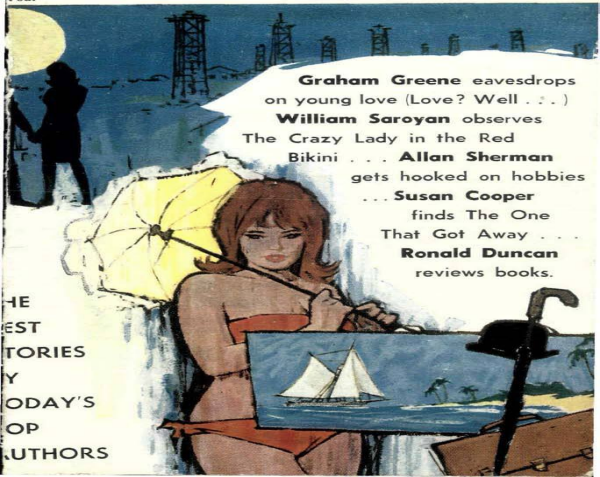
argosy

April

ustralia
cents.
w Zealand
. 0d.



Graham Greene eavesdrops on young love (Love? Well . . .) **William Saroyan** observes The Crazy Lady in the Red Bikini . . . **Allan Sherman** gets hooked on hobbies . . . **Susan Cooper** finds The One That Got Away . . . **Ronald Duncan** reviews books.

HE
EST
TORIES
Y
ODAY'S
OP
UTHORS

argosy

Vol. XXVII No. 4 Cover by Jon Davis APRIL 1966

The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen	Graham Greene	2
Affront	Donald Barthelme	7
Man at Work		15
She Fell Among Thieves	Robert Edmond Alter	16
Illustration by Neville Dear		
The One That Got Away	Susan Cooper	28
Foxer	Brian Cleeve	34
Illustrations by Pete		
The Crazy Lady in the Red Bikini	William Saroyan	49
Hat Tricks		56
Wilshaw Girl	William Scott	59
Successful Lettuce-Growing	Edward Hyams	69
No More Gifts	Willard Marsh	77
Sherman—on Hobbies	Allan Sherman	84
Illustrations by Fred Reynolds		
The Park	Leone Stewart	89
It is Lonely Here	John Sibly	100
Waltz	Felix Marti-Ibanez	113
Long Shot	Don Stanford	119
A Life to Lose (Last Part)	Lawrence Hammond	124
Illustration by Robb		
Book Reviews	Ronald Duncan	159
Argosy Crossword		168

Acknowledgments are due for permission to reprint copyright material by the following authors: to J. M. Dent for the John D. Sheridan extract from "While the Humour is on Me"; to Dennis Dobson for the poems from "A Dustbin of Milligan"; to Hutchinson for the Mary Eden extract from "The Saturday Book No. 17," edited by John Hadfield; to Methuen for the Thelwell cartoon on page 118 from "A Place of Your Own"

© Fleetway Publications Ltd., 1966

A Fleetway magazine

2,000 Editors have bought R.I. Students' Work

If you are interested in writing as an extra source of income, you should send today for a free copy of "How to Succeed as a Writer," the informative prospectus issued by the Regent Institute.

This valuable and interesting booklet tells you just the things you want to know about writing—the openings for new writers, what editors want, the rates paid for contributions—and quotes striking successes by R.I. students. It shows that experienced writers will guide you throughout and that the tuition is planned to help you to get into print as soon as possible.

There are many people who as a result of sending for "How to Succeed as a Writer" have been enabled to add to their income in spare time. For example:

"I have all the success I could have wished for."

"I have succeeded in breaking into print fairly often."

"I took a course with you several years ago and have since done a lot of writing for magazines, radio, etc."

"I have numerous published stories and articles to my credit."

"I have a ready market for pretty well everything I produce. May I say once more how supremely grateful I am that I took your Course."

The Regent Institute is a member of the Association of British Correspondence Colleges.

Writing is the most profitable as well as the most satisfying of hobbies.

If you have the desire to write and have a naturally alert mind, the Regent Institute can teach you to produce the types of contribution for which editors are always looking.

The stimulating, intensely practical R.I. method enables you to master the technique of writing—how to write, what to write about, how to get ideas and HOW TO SELL YOUR WORK. Many students have earned the fee **several times over** while learning.

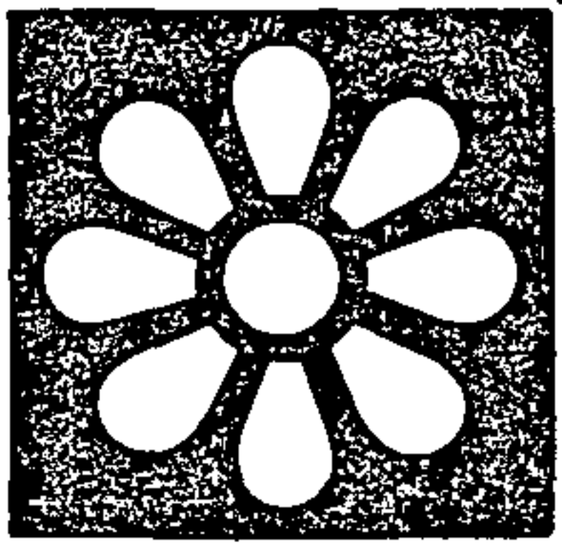
Since the Institute was founded R.I. students have sold articles and short stories to over 2,000 journals at home and overseas —a record without equal.

Send for the free booklet now. It gives full information about the *completely personal* courses that have enabled R.I. students to achieve outstanding success, and it describes the wide field of opportunity open to you.

THE REGENT INSTITUTE
(Dept. 242C), Palace Gate, London, W.8

2

GRAHAM GREENE



The Invisible

THERE were eight Japanese gentlemen having a fish dinner at Bentley's. They spoke to each other rarely, in their incomprehensible tongue, but always with a courteous smile and often with a small bow. All but one of them wore glasses. Sometimes the pretty girl who sat at a table beyond gave them a passing glance, but her own problem seemed too serious for her to pay real attention to anyone in the world except herself and her companion.

She had thin, blonde hair and her face was pretty and *petite* in a Regency way, oval like a miniature, though she had a harsh way of speaking—perhaps the accent of the school, Roedean or Cheltenham Ladies' College, which she had not long ago left. She wore a man's signet ring on her engagement finger, and as I sat down at my own table, with the Japanese gentlemen between us, she said, "So you see, we could marry next week."

"Yes?"

Her companion appeared a little distraught. He refilled their glasses with Chablis and said, "Of course, but Mother . . ."

I missed some of the conversation then, because the eldest Japanese gentleman leaned across the table, with a smile and a little bow, and uttered a whole paragraph like the mutter from an aviary, while everyone bent towards him and smiled and listened, and I couldn't help attending to him myself.

The girl's fiancé resembled her physically. I could see them as two miniatures hanging side by side on white wood panels. He should have been a young officer in Nelson's navy in the

HOW DOES ONE WRITER SEE ANOTHER? GREENE, THE REALIST, CASTS A SHREWD WRY GLANCE AT A POSSIBLE RIVAL OF THE FUTURE!

Japanese Gentlemen

days when a certain weakness and sensitivity was no bar to promotion.

She said, "They are giving me an advance of five hundred pounds, and they've sold the paperback rights already."

The hard commercial declaration came as a shock to me; it was a shock too, that she was one of my own profession. She couldn't have been more than twenty. She deserved better of life.

He said, "But my uncle—"

"You know you don't get on with him. This way we shall be quite independent."

"*You* will be independent," he said grudgingly.

"The wine trade wouldn't really suit you, would it? I spoke to my publisher about you and there's a very good chance, if you began with some reading—"

"But I don't know a thing about books."

"I would help you at the start."

"My mother says that writing is a good crutch..."

."Five hundred pounds and half the paperback rights is a pretty solid crutch," she said.

"This Chablis is good, isn't it?"

"I daresay."

I began to change my opinion of him—he had not the Nelson touch. He was doomed to defeat.

She came alongside and raked him fore and aft: "Do you know what Mr. Dwight said?"

"Who's Dwight?"

"Darling, you don't listen, do you? My publisher. He said he hadn't read a first novel in the last ten years which showed such powers of observation."

"That's wonderful," he said sadly, "wonderful."

"Only he wants me to change the title."

"Yes?"

"He doesn't like *The Ever-Rolling Stream*. He wants to call it *The Chelsea Set*."

"What did you say?"

"I agreed. I do think that with a first novel one should try to keep one's publisher happy. Especially when, really, he's going to pay for our marriage, isn't he?"

"I see what you mean." Absentmindedly he stirred his Chablis with a fork—perhaps before the engagement he had always bought champagne.

The Japanese gentlemen had finished their fish and, with very little English but with elaborate courtesy, they were ordering from the middle-aged waitress a fresh-fruit salad. The girl looked at them, and then she looked at me, but I think she saw only the future. I wanted very much to warn her against any future based on a first novel called *The Chelsea Set*. I was on the side of the young man's mother. It was a humiliating thought, but I was over sixty; I was probably about his mother's age.

I wanted to say to her: Are you quite sure your publisher is telling you the truth? Publishers are human. They may sometimes exaggerate the virtues of the young and the pretty. Will *The Chelsea Set* be read in five years? Are you prepared for the years of effort—"the long defeat of doing nothing well"? As the years pass, writing will not become any easier, the daily effort will grow harder to endure, those "powers of observation" will become enfeebled; you will be judged, when you reach your forties, by performance and not by promise.

"My next novel is going to be about St. Tropez."

"I didn't know you'd ever been there."

"I haven't. A fresh eye's terribly important. I thought we might settle down there for six months."

"There wouldn't be much left of the advance by that time."

"The advance is only an advance. I get fifteen per cent after five thousand copies and twenty per cent after ten thousand. And, of course, another advance will be due, darling, when the next book's finished. A bigger one, if *The Chelsea Set* sells well."

"Suppose it doesn't?"

"Mr. Dwight says it will. He ought to know."

"My uncle would start me at twelve hundred."

"But, darling, how could you come, then, to St. Tropez?"

"Perhaps we'd do better to marry when you came back."

She said harshly, "I mightn't come back if *The Chelsea Set* sells well enough."

"Oh."

She looked at me and the party of Japanese gentlemen. She finished her wine. She said, "Is this a quarrel?"

"No."

"I've got a title for the next book—*The Azure Blue*."

"I thought azure *was* blue."

She looked at him with disappointment. "You don't really want to be married to a novelist, do you?"

"You aren't one yet."

"I was born one—Mr. Dwight says. My powers of observation . . ."

"Yes. You told me that, but dear, couldn't you observe a bit nearer home? Here in London."

"I've done that in *The Chelsea Set*. I don't want to repeat myself."

The bill had been lying beside them for some time now. He took out his wallet to pay, but she snatched the paper out of his reach.

She said, "This is my celebration."

"What of?"

"*The Chelsea Set*, of course. Darling, you're awfully decorative, but sometimes—well, you simply don't connect."

"I'd rather . . . if you don't mind . . ."

"No, darling, this is on me. And Mr. Dwight, of course."

He submitted, just as two of the Japanese gentlemen gave tongue simultaneously, then stopped abruptly and bowed to each other, as though they were blocked in a doorway.

I had thought the two young people matching miniatures, but what a contrast there was in fact. The same type of prettiness could contain weakness and strength. Her Regency counterpart, I suppose, would have borne a dozen children without the aid of anæsthetics, while he would have fallen an easy victim to the first dark eyes in Naples.

Would there one day be a dozen books on her shelf? They have to be born without an anæsthetic, too. I found myself hoping that *The Chelsea Set* would prove to be a disaster and that eventually she would take up photographic modelling, while

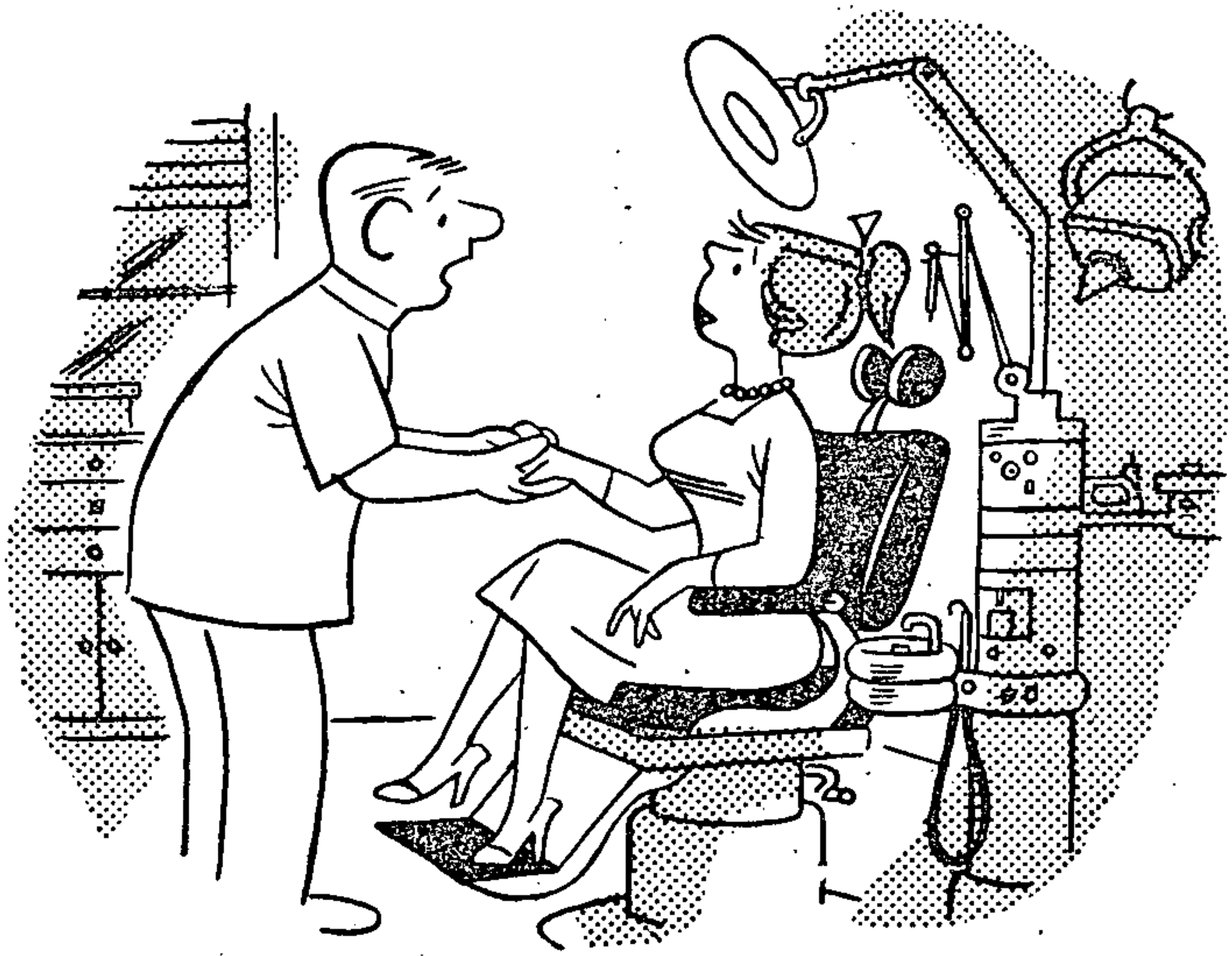
he established himself solidly in the wine trade in St. James's. I didn't like to think of her as the Mrs. Humphry Ward of her generation—not that I would live so long. Old age saves us from the realisation of a great many fears. I wondered to which publishing firm Dwight belonged. I could imagine the blurb he would have already written about her "abrasive powers of observation." There would be a photograph, if he was wise, on the back of the jacket; for reviewers, as well as publishers, are human, and she didn't look like Mrs. Humphry Ward.

I could hear them talking while they found their coats at the back of the restaurant.

He said, "I wonder what all those Japanese were doing here?"

"Japanese?" she said. "What Japanese, darling? Sometimes you are so evasive I think you don't want to marry me at all."

©Graham Greene 1965



"I love you, Barbara. Your hair is gorgeous, your eyes are beautiful, and your teeth are perfect, except for a tiny cavity in a central incisor."

BY DONALD BARTHELME

ALFRONT

Introducing a new writer who has already fired the American literary scene, and who here breaks all the rules with his exciting off-beat prose and kinky wit

NOW she's written this dirty great poem four pages long, won't let me read it, refuses absolutely, adamant, under no circumstances. Discovered it by accident. I had trudged home early, lingered in the hall for a bit wondering if I should trudge inside, a strange reluctance, a boding of some kind. Then I trudged inside.

"Here's the mail," I said.

She was writing something, I could see that.

"Here's the mail," I said again; usually she likes to paw over the mail, but she was preoccupied, didn't look up, not a flicker.

"What are you doing there," I asked, "writing something?"

She looked up.

"Yes," she said and looked down again without a pinch of emotion colouring the agate of her agate eyes.

"A letter?" I asked, wondering, if a letter, then to whom and about what.

"No," she said.

"A list?" I asked, inspecting her brown face for a hint of *tendresse*. But there was no *tendresse*.

"No," she said.

I noticed that she had switched the tulips from the green bowl to the blue bowl.

"What then?" I asked.

I noticed that she had shifted the lilies from the escritoire to the chiffonier.

"What then?" I repeated.

I observed that she had hauled the Indian paintbrush all the way out into the kitchen.

Then she broke the silence.

"Poem," she said.

I had the mail in my paw still.

"Poem?" I said.

"Poem," she said.

There it was, the red meat on the rug, as they say.

"Oh," I said.

Then: "What kind of a poem?"

A flat look.

"Just," she said, "a poem."

"Well," I said, "can I have a peek?"

"No," she said.

We have always shared everything—the Exercycle, the psychiatrist, the Fruit-of-the-Month, the amazing height-increasing shoes. I eyed her, she eyed me, we eyed each other for a bit.

"You don't want to give me a peek?"

"No," she said. That made twice she had said it.

"Well," I said, affecting not to care, "I don't care."

She said nothing when I said that.

"Don't you care," I asked, "if I care?"

She said nothing when I said that.

"How long is it, if I may be so bald?"

"Four pages," she said, "presently."

Presently!

Then I showed her the one where I turn three silk handkerchiefs into the American flag and the one where I produce three live goldfish from a previously empty goldfish bowl and the one where I pull twenty-five feet of sash cord from my mouth, the mouth having been shown absolutely ordinary and unprepared. But she was not paying attention.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Sleeves of Her Yellow Sweater Were Pushed Up on Her Forearms

The sleeves of her yellow sweater were pushed up on her forearms in a particularly poignant way. It put me in mind of when she was washing, when we were young.

I remembered the diary. She wrote it in Swedish—her no more Swedish than any of us. She had got it from her Swedish book.

I trudged in one day with the mail.

"Here's the mail," I said.

She was writing something I could see that.

"What are you writing there," I asked, "in Swedish?"

"It is my diary," she said.

"And what does it say?" I asked.

"I will not tell you," she said, "Peter."

"And why not?"

"Because it is my personal diary of intimate thoughts," she replied, twisting her hands together in anguished repudiation of the very idea.

She was younger then.

"Is it 'blue'?" I asked.

"It is not 'blue,'" she said, "particularly. There are perhaps 'blue' pages but women have animal instincts just like men, if you can believe it."

"I believe it," I said, "but I daresay I dislike the idea of you reserving your best and bluest thoughts not for me but for it, Cecelia."

The diary sat open on the table covered with her arms, neck, chest and back.

"I have blue thoughts for you, too," she said, rashers of tears springing from her darling ducts.

"But you don't tell me," I said, inwardly moved by the tremendous poignance of what I was saying.

"Sometimes," she said, and I said, "Never."

Then she told me about a bed in Paris under a fan-shaped window where she lay, blue thoughts rocketing through her head the day long.

This was a confidence, and I appreciated it. I sang her a new song I had made, *Savage Resentment*, and we sang together my old song, *Incomprehensible Guilt*. She tore out the pages containing the thoughts and promised to forget what Swedish she knew.

We had a roaring good time together, then! I showed her the one where I pluck four white doves out of the air and the one where I find the chosen card inside a balloon and the one where I am locked in a mailbag and emerge within three minutes with the still-sealed mailbag draped over my arms. And her face coloured with pleasurable astonishment, each time.

CHAPTER THREE:

At Dinner We Discussed the Psychiatrist

At dinner we discussed the psychiatrist.

"And the psychiatrist?" I said.

"He was unforgivable," she said.

"Unforgivable?".

"He said I was uninteresting."

"Uninteresting?"

"He said I was a screaming bore."

"Duck is delicious."

"He said he wasn't in this for the money."

"For what then?"

"For grins, he said."

"The expression is unfamiliar."

"There were not a million grins in my history, he said."

"Shabby of him."

"He said let's go to a movie for God's sake."

"And?"

"We went to a movie."

"Which?"

"A Walt Disney."

"How was it?"

"Excellent."

"Who paid?"

"He."

"Did you hold hands?"

"*Naturellement.*"

"And after?"

"Drinks."

"And after that?"

"Don't pry."

"But," I said, putting down the duck, "*three days* at the psychiatrist's . . ."

CHAPTER FOUR:

Then Dan Entered Carrying a Large Parcel Wrapped in Brown Paper

Then Dan entered carrying a large parcel wrapped in brown paper and tied with a number of neat knots.

"Dan," I said.

"Dan, dear," she said.

"How've you been, Dan?" I asked. "How is the psychiatry business?"

Dan smiled.

"Is there somewhere I can put this?" he asked, indicating the large parcel he held in his arms. "It is a new thing I have just finished today. Still a little wet I'm afraid." He wiped his hands, which were covered with emulsions, on his trousers. "I'll just lean it up against the television for a moment."

The new thing, a dirty great banality in four shades of white, leaned wetly against the television.

"Interesting," I said.

"It's poor," Cecelia said. "Poor, poor."

"Yes," Dan said, "one of my poorer things, I think."

"Not so poor of course as yesterday's—poorer on the other hand than many," she said.

"Yes," Dan said, "it has some of the qualities of poorness."

"Especially poor in the lower left-hand corner," she said.

"Yes," Dan said, "I would go so far as to sell it."

"They're getting poorer," she said.

"Poorer and poorer," Dan said with satisfaction, "descending to unexplored depths of poorness where no human intelligence has ever been."

"I find it extremely interesting as a social phenomenon," Cecelia said, "to note that during the height of what is variously called action painting, abstract expressionism and so forth, when most artists were grouped together in a school, you have persisted in an image alone. That, I find—and I think it has been described as hard-edge painting, is an apt description, although it leaves out a lot, but I find it very interesting that in the last few years there is a tremendous new surge of work being done in the hard-edge image. I don't know if you want to comment on that, but I find it extremely interesting that you, who have always been sure of yourself and your image, were one of the earliest, almost founders of that school, if you can even call it a school."

"I have always been sure of myself and my image," Dan said.

"Sublimely poor," she murmured.

"Wallpaper," he said, and they kissed.

Then I showed them the one where I thrust a lighted cigarette through a sheet of plate glass and the one where I pour any drink called for—beer, wine, milk, *crème de bananes* or other—from an ordinary newspaper and the one where I cut and restore a five-dollar bill.

But they were talking about the inviolability of the picture plane.

CHAPTER FIVE:

It is For You, Cecelia, He Said

"It is for you, Cecelia," he said. "And, of course, also for your husband, Peter. I wanted you to have something of mine hanging in your house."

"Oh, Dan!" she exclaimed. Her face was washed with many kinds of pleased incredulity. "Peter, isn't that nice of Dan!"

"Nice," I said.

I thought then of the things I hold dear: (a) Beiderbecke at the pianoforte, (b) Cecelia in her yellow sweater, (c) duck in orange sauce, (d) Rabelais, (e) certain sly manœuvres with coins invented by the British master, Bagshawe, (f) Indian paintbrush.

These values were threatened, I felt, by other values, new things rushing into the world displacing old things, such as our affection of nineteen years, three months, two days, etc., etc. The alien values represented, at the moment, by the alienist, Dan. The clash of values ringing through the Indian paintbrush-scented rooms. That was the situation as I saw it, then.

Dan munched his dessert. "Well, what have you been doing with yourself, Cecelia, since last we met?" he asked, crossing his herring-bone legs with their cream shoes. "Writing a poem?"

"Yes," Cecelia said. "Although how you knew *that*, Dan, I will never understand in a hundred years. I suppose it is your deep, highly-trained insight into human agony."

"I suppose so," Dan said moodily. "Can I have just a touch more of the Camembert? Marvellous, really. It comes from France, doesn't it?"

"France!" Cecelia exclaimed. "Home of such fine poets as Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau, Henri Michaux, Lautréamont, Apollinaire, Paul Claudel, Philippe Soupault, Blaise Cendrars, Arthur Rimbaud, Francis Carco, Robert Desnos, André Breton, Léon Paul Fargue, Francis Jammes, Gérard de Nerval, René Char, Tristan Corbière, Alfred Jarry, Pierre Reverdy, Pierre Mac-Orlan, Saint-Poul-Roux, Jules Laforgue, Charles Baudelaire, St.-J. Perse, André Frenaud, Paul Verlaine, René Guy Cadou, Max Elskamp, Charles Cros, Pierre Jean Jouve, Paul Valéry, André Salmon, Maurice Fombeure, Charles Péguy, Joe Bousquet, Antonin Artaud, Pierre Emmanuel, Frédéric Mistral, Charles Vildrac, Paul Gilson, Jean Rousselot, Raymond Queneau, Jehan Rictus, Benjamin Peret, P. de la Tour du Pin, Louis Emié, Raymond

Roussel, André Spire, Lucien Becker, Jacques Prevert, Stéphane Mallarmé, Francis Ponge, Georges Brassens, Louise de Vilmorin, Michel Leris; J. K. Huysmans, and many others. France! *Would that I were there now ! instead of here !"*

"The Camembert would be fresher, I suppose," Dan observed. "But that's not the idea, is it? It's supposed to be rather rank, isn't it?"

"As woman's love," I said.

"Well," Dan said, rising, "I have a few insights I have to run down this evening, if you'll excuse me." He looked about the room uncertainly. "What did I do with my mace? Goodnight, children." Cecelia carried his golden mace to the door.

We trudged to bed, then. She was lying there in her black nightdress with little flowers at the neck.

"He is certainly a well-integrated personality," she said.

"Yes."

"He makes contact, you must grant him that."

"Yes."

"A beautiful human being."

"Mace is a bit much, perhaps."

"We are fortunate to have him in our country," she concluded.

CHAPTER SIX:

But the Poem Remained Between Us Like . . .

But the poem remained between us like an immense, wrecked railway carriage.

"Touching the poem," I said, "is it rhymed or free?"

"Free," she said, "free, free, free."

"And the theme?"

"One of the great themes," she said, "that is all I can reveal at this time."

"Could you tell me the first word?"

"The first word is 'bandagedandwounded.'"

"But . . ."

"Run together," she said.

I mentally reviewed the great themes in the light of the word, or words, "bandaged and wounded."

"How is it that bandage precedes wound?"

"A metaphor of the self armouring itself against the gaze of The Other."

"The theme is loss, I take it."

"What," she said, "else?"

"Are you specific as to what is lost?"

"Brutally."

"Cecelia," I said, "why do you remain with me? here? in this house? after all?"

There was a silence.

Then she said: "It must be laid, one suspects, to a failure of the imagination. One cannot imagine anything better. If you can believe it."

I was pleased by this powerful restatement of our essential mutuality, which can never be sundered or torn, or broken apart, dissipated, diluted, corrupted, or finally severed, not even by art in its manifold and dreadful guises. So I showed her the one where I change sand to salt and the one where I levitate an unabridged dictionary and the one where I wrest nine golf balls from a bare crystal casket. And her face flamed with all sorts of wonder and surprise, for which I was, and am, profoundly grateful.

© Donald Barthelme 1965

SO FAIR IS SHE

So fair is she!
So fair her face
So fair her pulsing figure

Not so fair
The maniacal stare
Of a husband who's much bigger.

RAIN

There are holes in the sky
Where the rain gets in,
But they're ever so small
That's why rain is thin.

LADY B'S FLEAS

Lady Bainaby takes her ease
'Knitting overcoats for fleas
By this kindness, fleas are smitten
That's why she's very rarely bitten.

SPIKE MILLIGAN, *A Dustbin of Milligan*

The human instinct to get "the inside story" prompted Argosy into an artist's studio to see the man at work and achieving his—goal

SHE FELL AMONG THIEVES

There was not a reputable archæological group in the whole world that would touch him with a ten-foot pole

by ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

OUR six Trans-Jordan boys were spading back the hard, cindery earth crusted over a formation of flat, snug stones. Either they were uncovering an old, worthless stone floor or they were uncovering an old, old, sunken stone roof. Which might mean there was something under the roof. Something of archæological value.

I was sitting on a broken bit of wall just above them, supervising the job. Tanner, my partner, was in his tent with the shakes. He had been suffering from intermittent fever for the past few days. It was an old complaint with him. He'd had malaria in Cambodia. But that was before I knew him.

Twilight was flowing over the Jordan hills and the first fat drops of the long-awaited rain were just beginning to splat on the bone-dry earth. They were widely separate at first, each silvery pear-shaped drop striking the earth like a tiny ripe fruit. I wished the boys would hurry—before the rain turned to buck-shot.

The head man, Hassin, straightened up and grinned at me. He was very thrifty with his English words. If a grin would suffice, he always had one ready.

"Very good," I said.

They had uncovered the total area of the stone flooring or roofing. The stones formed a rectangle of, say, twenty feet by fifteen. I squatted down for a closer inspection. The light was dimming rapidly.

It was a roof, all right, formed by overlapping courses of

masonry crowned by hewn cap-stones. Couldn't be any doubt about it. So—was it possible that we had uncovered the first room of a lost city, or was it merely an old cellar? One way or another, the long-gone artisans who had laid this roof had put it together to last, to endure through centuries of dust-submerged oblivion.

Why? What was housed in the space under the old roof?

"Good," I said to Hassin. "Remove one of the corner-stones."

He translated the order and the Arabs went to work with crow-bars, prising up one of the fair-sized slabs. A rectangle of black, hollow space appeared.

"Bring the ladder and the torch," I said.

Waiting for them, I fished out a stub of candle and lit it. A cold, black, unwholesome odour rose from the hole in the roof. I tested the air with the candle, to make sure there were no poisonous gases. Then the boys sank the ladder in the opening and Hassin handed me the torch.

"You and the men stay up here," I said. "Understand? Give them cigarettes."

He grinned and nodded.

Tanner had taught me not to trust them. What they saw, they talked about, and Tanner was the type of digger who preferred to keep his findings to himself—unless they were the usual run-of-the-mill artefacts. I started down the ladder.

The place itself was not truly clammy. It was the cold, dark air that gave it that suggestion. I started to shiver. The pregnant raindrops followed me down the rungs. I played the torch over the old stone walls, seeing here and there a faint white filigree of mould. The flooring was the earth itself and it was as black as sin.

The figure of a naked white female stood in the torch's halo.

It took me so by surprise that for an absurd moment I almost blurted out, "Excuse me." Then I had to laugh at myself. It was only a life-sized marble statue. It glowed, pale and cold and glorious, like moonlight. I went closer.

It was the most remarkable statue I had ever seen. The detail of the female was astounding—hair, eyelashes, finger-nails, everything. She stood with her legs slightly apart, her torso turning at the hips, her head looking back over one shoulder. It was the expression on her face that held me. It was enigmatic. Was it surprise, horror or ecstasy? At what strange sight was she staring? Involuntarily, I threw a mechanical glance over my own shoulder. Stupid! Who had

been the sculptor? How had the statue come here? How long ago? Excitement beat in my ears, slopped and slushed around in my brain like warm, heady wine. I was dead certain that I had made an exceedingly valuable discovery.

I went back up the ladder and dismissed the work crew. Hassin grinned at me as he turned away. Had he seen? Had he peered through the roof?

I hurried through the rubble of our digging to Tanner's tent. The rain was coming down like wet bayonet points. "You've never dreamed of a statue like this," I told Tanner. "She—she's beautiful! And that's a weak word. The look on her face. That enigmatic expression!"

Tanner grunted and threw a quinine pill into his mouth. He was a squat, powerful man. Bald. He was a free-lancer. Had to be. There wasn't a reputable archæological group in the world that would touch him with a ten-foot pole. His methods were shady. The Mexican Government was down on him for smuggling artefacts out of Yucatan; he had been run out of Cambodia for the same business, and the Greeks threw up their hands in horror at the mention of his name. I was new to the game and this was my first jaunt with Tanner. I didn't especially like the man, but I admired his professional knowledge. It seemed to me that I could learn quite a bit about the financial end of archæology from Tanner.

"I didn't think you could find statuary of that kind in this region," I said.

Tanner trembled with his fever and smiled wryly. "Neither did I—after the way you describe her. But there could be a hundred reasons how she came to this place. Let's look."

In raincoats, with topees on our heads, we went out into the rain-lashed night. It was turning torrential. On our left, we heard it machine-gunning the dark, salty surface of the Dead Sea.

Tanner took one look at the white statue and went into a spasm of trembling. "G-God, she's f-fantastic, Miller! Ge-get the Coleman lit."

I ignited the two meshy little bags and raised the lantern for another look at the statue. Tanner prowled around her like an Arab chieftain contemplating a marketable female slave.

"Fantastic! The equisite d-detail of her!" He shivered violently, hugging his upper arms. "She's old, old, old. My boy, you have no idea how old. She's not Greek or Roman. Hell, even their greatest sculptors couldn't capture a facial

expression like that. You can see the pores in her skin!"

Her face had me again—that enigmatic backward look. What had she seen? I pulled my eyes away.

"Look at her *coiffure*," Tanner demanded. "The sculptor used a Jewess for his model. Miller, I'll stake my reputation she dates back to the Old Testament."

I wondered to which reputation he was making reference. Then I found out. He turned to me and, in that sepulchral place, with that pale, cold female standing by us, his fever-bright eyes looked wild. "Miller—do you have any idea what she's worth?" he asked, his eyes greedy.

I shook my head, staring at him, knowing what was coming.

"She's worth the thirty years I've spent grubbing in this business. Twelve times I've tracked around the world searching for her—without even realising that she, or something as magnificent as her, existed! This—" he gestured towards the glowing female object "—is the treasure hunter's dream. This is the bonanza!"

I said, "You have more to say."

"Oh, yes. Oh, my God, yes! Much more. There's thousands in her, Miller. I know the right people. Two of them are in Paris. No questions asked. No mention of our names, ever. Nothing on paper. And no taxes. Right down the middle, boy. Fifty-fifty. If . . ."

"If I help you smuggle her out of the country," I said.

He laughed, his eyes leaping from my face to her face.

"There's no other way to work it. You know there isn't. That greasy governor of this district is as grabbing as a fishnet strung with hooks. We're damned well lucky if he'll let us keep the worthless potsherds and beads we turn up. Do Hassin and the boys know about her?"

"I don't think so. I came down here by myself. But who ever knows about Hassin? He might have sneaked a look when my back was turned."

Tanner nodded, shivering. "If he knows, he'll run straight to the authorities. Not a doubt of it. Miller, we're getting her out of here tonight. Now."

I argued with him. For a minute, half-heartedly. But I was already caught up in the infectious aura of his excitement. And we both knew it. I would be rich. Or, if Tanner failed to turn up the right buyer, I would at least be famous.

"You're certain of her age and value?" I'd accept any assurance.

"I know my business, don't I? She's not listed in any

catalogue, I know. Her true worth will be any connoisseur's guess. But you can leave that part to me. All you have to do is help me get her out."

"To where? And how?" I asked. He was sweating now.

"To Israel. That's the first move. I know an influential Jew there who'll help us for a little rake-off. Let's see... we'd have to find and steal some kind of craft to cross the Dead Sea. And those damned Arab patrol boats would probably catch us halfway over. No. We'll take the truck and follow the shore down to Ein Hatseva. The barbed wire ends about fifteen miles below Sodom. All right?"

I nodded. "Right."

We had to rig up the block and tackle to get her out of the pit. She was heavy, but not as heavy as I thought marble would be.

"What do you think she is—chalcedony?" I asked as we hauled and shoved and strained in our own sweat, with the blinding torrent of rain pouring down on us. "You notice how she seems to have a certain sparkle about her in the light?"

"Could—could be just the moisture," Tanner grunted. "After æons of dampness down in that cellar."

Maybe. But the cellar had seemed as hermetically sealed as King Tutankhamen's tomb.

We swayed her up into the rain and the dark and Tanner said, "Get the truck. Hurry! For God's sake hurry!"

Our vehicle was an archaic old wreck with tall, metal sides and an open top. I backed her up and trotted round to drop the tail-board. Tanner, holding on to the swaying statue in the tackle, watched me balefully. The board came down with a rusty screech, like an ecstatic banshee bursting loose. Cold, black water gurgled out of the truck. Tanner was shivering so violently that his teeth actually chattered.

"All right. G-get her b-by the sh-sh—*n-not by the head,* man! G-good God, be careful! B-by the shoulders!"

Grunting, heaving, shoving up, we jockeyed the gleaming woman-sized statue into the truck, Tanner hissing like a frantic boa constrictor: "Easy n-now! Careful! D-don't chip her!"

She was in, on her back with the rain peppering her body, her head slightly turned over her left shoulder, staring with that strange, fixed expression. At what? I slammed up the tail-board. "I'll d-drive," Tanner said, and he gave me a shove.

Frowning with apprehension, I squelched round to the passenger side and climbed into the cab. Tanner slammed the

door on his side, and for a long moment, he clung to the wheel with the shakes.

"My God, Tanner. You're in no shape for this. You'll kill—"

"Shut up! I've been through worse than this in Brazil and Cambodia. And for less—far less. W-what do you want me to do? Crawl into my tent w-with my pills for a week? And let that damned governor snatch her away from me! I'll be all right, I tell you."

He switched on, got in gear, and we jolted out of the mud with a tyre spin and a neck-snapping leap and went lurching for the road.

"*Easy!*" I yelled.

"Shut up!" he snapped.

The old truck slid on to the road, careening slightly, found a grip and went rolling into the gold-streaked blackness.

Outside, it rain, rain, rained. Inside it dribbled, the moisture seeping around the door frames and the seams near the windscreen. The truck skidded, swerved, slewed around, the tyres treading for the ground, finding it, digging in and going forward again, and Tanner shivering and chattering and hunching down over the wheel.

And suddenly it all seemed crazy to me—this pell-mell race into the night down a muddy, nameless road, in blinding rain, the fever-ridden, obsessed man clutching the swerving wheel at my side, and that pale, cold, wet female statue riding behind me, with her head turned over her shoulder, staring...

"Tanner," I said. "This is all wrong."

"Shut up! Damn it, Miller, shut up! Can't you realise what I've got in the back of this truck? It's my life. My entire life! Thirty years of searching and dreaming. Never honestly believing that she or anything like her would actually appear. And now she has. She has! And I've got her, and I'm going to get her out; no power on earth can stop me!"

His heavy use of the first-person concerned me: *I've, I'm, me, my*... Did he still consider me his fifty-fifty partner? Was it the fever or the statue that was destroying his rationality?

A crystalline white eye materialised ahead of us, far down the road but moving towards us. It came to a stop and then a second, smaller light appeared and began to wig-wag at us.

"That's a motorcycle," I said. "Someone's signalling us with a torch to stop."

Then I realised that Tanner meant to drive right over the man and his motorcycle.

I slashed at his brake foot with my left boot. "You fool! You can't kill him!"

The truck went into a mad skid, the rear end skittering halfway round in the mud.

"Damn you!"

"Will you take it easy!" I yelled at him.

A rain-coated Arab was picking his way towards us, slipping in the mud. He was one of the shore patrolmen and he carried an old World War II machine pistol in the cradle of his arm. He came up to Tanner's side and tapped the muzzle of the weapon against the streaming window. Tanner silently rolled it down.

"Your identification," the Arab said. "Where are you going?"

We dug out our wallets and showed him our ID cards. "Al Mazra," Tanner said in a quiet, almost dreamy, voice.

"You see we're archæologists," I said. "We move from place to place, searching for Dead Sea Scrolls."

"So?" the Arab said. "Let me see your permits, please."

"You have them," Tanner said. "They're in our wallets."

"Yes? And what are you carrying in this truck?"

"Only our equipment," I said.

"So? We will have a look."

Tanner reached down between his legs. The gesture had no meaning for me at that moment. I was in a panic to get out of my door and meet the Arab at the back of the truck. I knew these people. They could be bribed.

The rain hit me like a break in a dyke. I squelched to the back of the truck. The Arab came round the other end.

"Open up," he ordered.

The inside of the truck must have been like a bathtub. Rainwater was pouring out of every crack and hole. I put my hand on the right-hand bolt of the tail-board and smiled at him. "Look here . . ." I started to say.

Tanner's silhouette appeared behind the Arab and I saw his right arm swing up. The wrench literally bounced off the Arab's head and the machine pistol roared *babap bap* straight in the air as the senseless man dropped into the mud.

"*Tanner!* You crazy idiot! We could have bribed him!"

Tanner said nothing. He threw the wrench aside and yanked the machine pistol away from the Arab. Then he said, "Drag him into the karoo shrub. Hurry!"

I stooped over the prostrate man, but in the night and the rain, I couldn't tell how badly he was hurt. He didn't seem

right to me, though. "Tanner, he's badly hurt or he's dead."

The muzzle of the machine pistol tapped me coldly, jarringly, under the chin, then retreated. When I looked up, Tanner was aiming at my chest. "Drag him into the bush."

"Tanner, listen to me. What if he's not dead? What if he's badly hurt? We can't leave him out here in—"

"Get him into the bush."

It wasn't necessary for him to say "or . . ." I knew where I stood. Either I dragged the Arab into the bush, or I joined him in the muddy road.

"You drive," Tanner said. And there were no ifs about that, either. Not with that gun aimed at my navel.

He herded me around through the passenger side and followed me into the cab. I released the brake and put the truck in gear and started to ease round the parked motorcycle. Tanner kept the gun at my right side.

"We could have bribed him, Tanner," I said again.

"No. He knew about us," Tanner insisted. "The governor sent him."

"Damn it, he *didn't* know about us! You hit him for no reason!"

"Shut up and drive!" The barrel nudged me in the ribs.

I was scared—sick-stomach scared. I could still hear the *bappity-bap* of that gun ringing in my ears. Those slugs would go through me like darning needles through warm butter. I shut up and drove.

The rain poured down. Tanner went in and out of the shakes. We passed through the district of Moab, then through sleeping Al Mazra. In less than an hour we skirted Khinzirah and headed for As Safiyah. Another ten miles and we could cut west and aim for Beersheba, in Israel.

Tanner was starting to mutter to himself. "...So old she might go into the reckoning of millenniums. Tell you, she's of no known period. Might even belong to Abraham's time. Seems impossible, and yet . . . and yet . . ."

And yet, she lay back there in the bouncing truck, alone in the wet night, as we droned on through the pouring darkness. It never let up, the rain, not for a moment. It seemed to cover the night land as Noah's deluge had once done.

Tanner figured we were past the barbed wire barricades which separated Jordan and Israel, and he said, "Take the first turning west." He was burning up again. When I looked at him, he was swabbing sweat from his face with his left hand.

Maybe I could have slammed on the brakes then and jumped

on him as he spun off-balance. Maybe I could have got that gun away from him. But I didn't. I don't know why not. I didn't. I just drove on.

Tanner was wrong. The Arabs had extended the Jordan line. The road we were on ran us smack into a frontier outpost. We were on top of it before I could do anything.

The white-and-red barricade was down, stabbing across our path, and an armed sentry was waving to us to halt with his torch. There was a guardhouse, and an officer wearing a khaki-coloured *chéchia* came through the door.

I hit the brakes and we went into a mud-creaming skid. Tanner swore and swung up the machine pistol. I grabbed at the barrel in a panic.

"Don't! There's a whole guardhouse of them. And look over there!" I pointed to the south of the sentry box.

Tanner hesitated, staring. Barbed-wire entanglements coiled off into the murk on either side of the road. There was a sand-bagged covered trench on top of the shallow bluff where the road curved down into No Man's Land. We could see a three-man crew squatting round a light machine gun. The nest commanded the road. "They'll cut us to shreds," I said.

Tanner sucked in his breath as the armed Arab officer came squelching noisily through the mud.

Tanner relaxed with a soul-weary sigh. "I had it," he muttered. "I had the answer for at least one man's purpose of existence in this stupid damn world. And now . . ."

The officer, followed by the sentry who carried an old Lebel rifle, came up on my side and the sentry swung the barrel of the Lebel towards me significantly. I rolled down the window, still clinging tightly to the barrel of Tanner's gun with my right hand. "*Bism' Allah*," I said to the officer, a lieutenant.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"We're American archæologists. We want to cross over to Beersheba."

"From where are you coming?"

"Upper Moab."

"Why didn't you cross at Sodom?"

Good question. I tried a bluff in simulated anger.

"We're sick and tired of bribes. We thought if we came far enough south, we could cross over without having to pay tribute to every son of Allah who stood in our way with a gun at our heads." The lieutenant laughed.

"You thought that, eh? What are you carrying into Israel?"

"Nothing."

He turned slightly without taking his eyes from me. "Keep your rifle at his head while I check the truck."

I stared blankly at the aimed Lebel rifle while my world turned slowly upside down. It wasn't just the trouble we would be in for trying to smuggle the statue out of the country; it might also be murder. Which would mean a firing squad.

I turned and looked at Tanner. He was trembling again, and his eyes were side-slipping in his moist face like a ferret caught in a trap. He still hadn't quite made up his mind.

"Don't," I whispered. "We'll never get through alive."

His sick eyes looked into mine.

"She's mine," he said hoarsely. "They can't take her away from me. I'd rather die than give her up!"

Then he snatched the barrel of the machine pistol from me.

The Arab lieutenant came slogging back.

"All right," he said. "You may pass."

I stared. Then I said, "Thank you."

Tanner looked stunned. He gaped at the lieutenant. I got in gear and let out the clutch and we shivered forward a few feet. Another sentry worked on some sort of gear in the dark and the white-and-red pole rose slowly into the raining sky.

I pressed down on the accelerator and we rumbled through the barricade and into the waiting blackness of No Man's Land. I didn't get it. I couldn't understand. True, I hadn't heard the tail-board drop, but surely the Arab officer had looked into the truck? Certainly, he had climbed up on the rear bumper and investigated the back of the truck with his torch. So why hadn't he seen the statue? Why hadn't he arrested us as smugglers?

"Stop the truck," Tanner said.

"What?"

"Stop! I want to look back here. Something's wrong."

"No," I said. "Not here. We're only a hundred yards from the Israel barricade. At this point, they can both see us."

"But something's wrong, Miller! What?"

"Wait! Damn it, can't you wait? The Jews are right ahead."

The armed Israelites came out from behind their barricade to meet us. I stopped the truck. This time it was a Jewish lieutenant who stepped up to the cab window.

"Who are you and what are you bringing into Israel?"

I don't know why I said it but I did. "Nothing. We're American archæologists."

"We'll see," the lieutenant said. "You realise that if you enter Israel now, you will not be permitted to re-enter Jordan?"

"That's all right by us;" I said.

"We'll have to check the back of your truck," he said.

Tanner was already out of his door. I shot out of mine. The three of us met at the back of the truck.

The lieutenant looked at us with raised, wet eyebrows. "Something wrong?"

"That's what we want to find out," I told him.

Tanner and I unbolted the tail-board and let it drop with its usual screech. We stared into the rain-whipped truck bottom. Water poured out of it like a miniature Niagara.

That's all there was—draining water. Nothing else.

"Stolen!" Tanner screamed. "My God, they stole her!"

"No!" I grabbed at his arm. "They didn't have a chance. We would have heard the tail-board. The Arab lieutenant was only back there for a few seconds by himself. He *couldn't* have got her out by himself. She weighs far too much."

"Then where?" Tanner wailed. "Where's she gone to? Oh, my God! *She's dissolved!* The rain! The filthy rain!"

He turned away from the open truck, away from me and the bewildered-looking lieutenant. And he started to laugh. The high mounting rocking laugh of insanity. He sat right down in the mud and roared with laughter until his breath failed him, and then he went into hiccupping, giggling sobs.

"Very nice," the lieutenant said to me. "Very nice what you've brought us. As if we didn't have our fair share already. Let us get him to the doctor. We'll have to strap him down."

The lieutenant and I left Tanner with the Jewish doctor. We went outside and over to the barbed wire to have a smoke. The rain had petered to a sullen mist. I had nothing to say. I had only one question and it wasn't anything the lieutenant could answer.

Where had she gone? How? And when?

The doctor came out and accepted a cigarette.

"I gave him a shot to calm him down," he told us. Then he looked at me and jerked his thumb back at his quarters. "Religious fanatic, eh?" he said.

"Who? Tanner? No. Why?"

"Because he keeps raving about Lot's wife," the doctor said. "About how she looked back at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah even though God had warned her not to. And so she was turned to a pillar of salt."

© Robert Edmond Alter 1965

EVERY MORNING THOUSANDS OF BOWLER HATS AND ROLLED UMBRELLAS COMMUTE TO A DAILY ROUTINE. HERE'S THE TRUE STORY OF A MAN WHO DECIDED HE'D HAD ENOUGH!

BY SUSAN COOPER

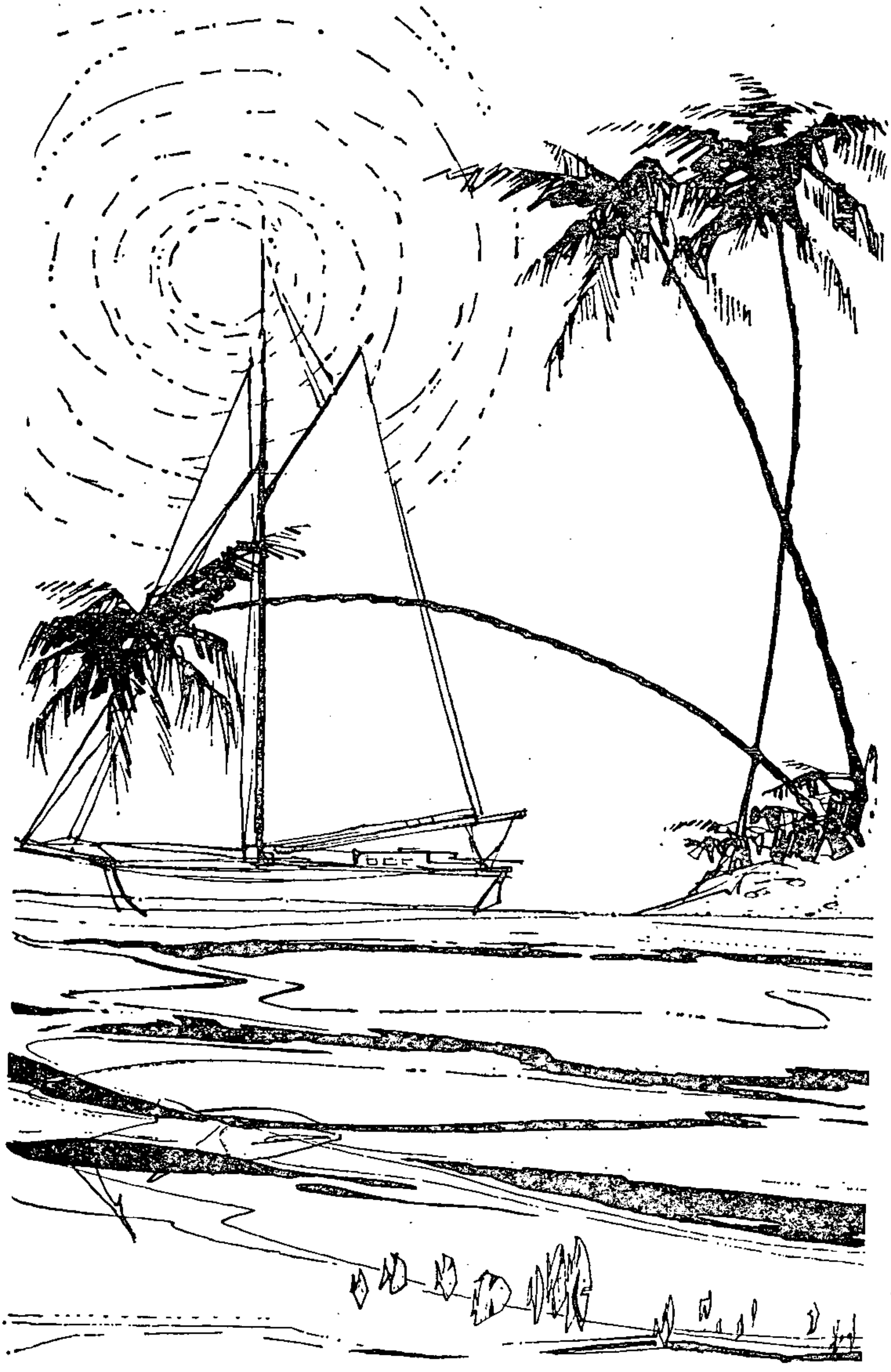
THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

THERE are two kinds of Royal Navy commanders—lean and leathery, with profiles, or big and chunky. Allan Batham is big and chunky: forty-seven years old, with wiry eyebrows and a voice that might on occasion carry halfway across the North Sea. But he is a long way from the North Sea now. He has accomplished something which most of the members of this island race will only ever dream about.

After seven years in Light Coastal Forces during World War II, Batham found himself a businessman; progressing through the family meat-packing firm until he ended up as managing director. Like many others, he was sailor-turned-commuter, with a wife, a son, a daughter and a house in Buckinghamshire—though unlike the many, he showed a certain restlessness of mind by standing for Parliament as a Liberal in 1950 and 1951. He didn't get in, though neither did he lose his deposit—a not inconsiderable feat for a Liberal candidate in those elections. For a few years then, he went on commuting up to London—and sailing, on family holidays, *Falcon*, his 36-foot yawl. For most businessmen, the combination might have been enough.

But one day, Allan and Jean Batham decided it was not enough for them.

"You can't say *when* a decision was made, not the precise moment," says Allan Batham. "But it had something to do



with the way I used to walk to the office every morning from Victoria, down St. James's Street. There came a point when I realised that I was passing the same people every day. It was when one began to *recognise* them—the awful infinity of it...

"Then there were the spars. Long, tapered spruce spars. A friend of ours had them in her cellar—she wanted to get rid of them, and I took six. I had no idea what I wanted to use them for. And then we sold the house and sailed the Atlantic, and used them as poles on *Falcon*, to spread the spinnaker out.

"We weren't emigrating to Canada, or anything wild and woolly like that. We just—went.

"My son was fifteen and at Bradfield, and I went down and took him out to lunch. I got him through the soup and then I said: 'Michael, are you prepared to sail the Atlantic with me?' I don't think he tasted very much more of that meal."

They had no very clear plans, but thought they would wander for a year. Anthony Chenevix-Trench, now headmaster of Eton, was then at Bradfield and encouraged them to take young Michael; it would, he said with uncommon good sense, probably do him as much good in unexpected ways as a year of school.

So *Falcon* set sail. The Bathams hit storms off southern Ireland, but for seventeen of the twenty-three friendly days it took them to reach Antigua from Tenerife, they barely touched the helm. Michael's education duly began to develop in the unexpected ways.

"He sat calculating one day," says Batham, "and then came to me and announced that we were a thousand miles from land in any direction, that there was nothing between us and the North or South Poles, and that if he fell overboard it would take him two hours and fifteen minutes to reach the bottom!"

They reached the Caribbean, and thought they would sail on through the Panama Canal and up the western coast of the USA. But instead, they found their island.

While *Falcon* lay in dock in Jamaica, waiting for stores and repairs, the Bathams heard that a manager was wanted for a small boatyard on Beef Island, farther east in the British Virgin group. To earn some money for a while, they decided to go there. And out across the blue-green water from Beef Island, ten minutes away by outboard dinghy, they saw for the first time the smallest of all the habitable British Virgin Islands, Marina Cay.

It was very small—six acres—and overgrown with moran, the curious grey-green tropical bush which resolutely survives

drought and hurricane alike; and it had lain uninhabited for years. But a weatherproof house stood empty on its leeward side, tucked behind some palms and a great multi-legged banyan tree. The Bathams looked at it, and at each other. Before very long they had moved into this house, and there they have been ever since.

The British Virgin Islands lie between Puerto Rico and the Leeward Islands; the largest is Tortola, and the many smaller islands have sturdy names given them by seventeenth-century sailors: Mosquito, Scrub, George, Dog. And Marina Cay (pronounced "key"). The Bathams live now by tourism; ten couples at a time sleep in small cottages on the island and eat with their hosts on the palm-thatched veranda of the first house. Most visitors are Americans for obvious geographical reasons and, although the Union Jack flies from their flagpole, the Bathams, like all other Virgin Islanders, deal in dollars.

They do not miss England or the *milieu* they left behind, though they remain as English as Burnham Beeches. They sit talking most evenings on the veranda, in the warm breeze that keeps the island free of mosquitoes, watching the moon glimmer on the dark sea and the stars very bright in the sky—you can see the Southern Cross tilt over Beef Island, if you stay up.

Allan Batham says, "Sometimes one misses the smell of a wood in spring. Things like that. But not cities, cars, crowds. Well, would you? Of course it's possible that Jean and I had shallower roots at home than some. She was born in the Argentine, and I was a bit of a wanderer. We've both been back to England, but we feel no gap. Visually this place is too perfect for one to want very much more. And as for people, there's contact with fresh minds all the time. Listen to them."

While Mozart wafts from the gramophone, two guests are discussing the relative merits of the court reporting in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *New York Times*. Three others are arguing the size and ferocity of a barracuda and a moray eel, both of which they encountered while scuba-diving with Batham—a long-time pillar of the British Sub-Aqua Club—off a nearby reef. In another corner, one man is describing current research into ESP, another demolishing Roosevelt's foreign policy; and a third has just begun discussing with Batham the chances of de-salinising seawater by using solar energy.

However, the water-shortage is one problem which the Bathams did not meet at home. They draw their own electricity from a small generator switched on between six and

eleven-thirty at night, but Marina Cay has no springs to provide fresh water, and when the rainwater level in their storage tank drops perilously low, they must import water from Tortola in barrels. Seawater is pumped in for the lavatories, and when fresh water runs very low everyone takes salt showers as well. The Virgin Islands have a mean annual rainfall of 50 inches (London has 23, Manchester 34) but it does not always come when it is wanted.

But it doesn't seem to spoil life for the expatriate Bathams. They are both very brown. All the year round the sun shines as it seldom shines in England, though only in high summer is the after-lunch siesta a necessity. They have forgotten what it is like to be cold. "If the temperature goes down to sixty-five we think we'll die," Jean Batham says. "And you have to live here for some time before you can catch the spring as it goes past. There are certain signs, but strangers have trouble noticing them."

They work hard, but it is not the work of the city or the suburbs. Allan Batham may, on a sample day, take out several scuba-diver guests for the day in his yawl *Aireymouse*—successor to *Falcon* which never left Jamaica, but foundered there in a hurricane. He will sail them across the Sir Francis Drake Channel to one of the dozens of wrecks which have been accumulating off the more misleading Virgin Islands for three hundred years, and which have given up the coral-encrusted cannon, anchors and assorted treasure-trove which now decorate one of the jetties on Marina Cay.

Jean Batham may go on her weekly shopping trip to Tortola; ferried over in a Boston whaler by Carol, Julian, Timothy or one of the other soft-spoken Virgin Islanders who make up her island staff. In Road Town, the sleepy capital, she buys pineapple and papaya in the native market, tinned goods in a wholesale store run by two other escapist Englishmen; meets some of the charter skippers from the boats out of St. Thomas, and goes back by bumpy taxi through the roads where donkeys carry water in kerosene drums, chickens wander through the gardens of the sun-battered little houses, and bougainvillaea riots everywhere. Her boat is waiting at the jetty, or planing hastily through the channels from Marina Cay. "Afternoon, mistress . . ."

On a table back at the house lies a copy of the *Illustrated London News*—a strange sight among the chunks of delicate bleached coral and the poinciana and orchids growing outside. On the shelves, the Bathams' books are both more and less

predictable: Joshua Slocum, C. S. Lewis, Kipling, Raynor Johnson, T. H. White, Rose Macaulay, Thor Heyerdahl, Knight on sailing, *The Oxford Book of English Verse* . . .

Development is creeping towards this haven now, of a kind that has already overtaken the Bahamas, farther north. Laurance Rockefeller has built a multi-million-dollar resort for a hundred guests five miles away on Virgin Gorda, and although the white coral beaches there are still sparsely populated, beer-cans and gum-wrappers have begun to glint under the mango trees.

Nearer Marina Cay, Beef Island's tiny earthen air-strip will soon be extended to take something bigger than a Cessna: a bridge is being built to link it with Tortola, and there are plans for one or two hotels. Anglo-American civilisation, with all its mixed blessings, is beginning to overtake the British Virgin Islands at last.

But it will not overtake the family who came there to get away from it all. Allan Batham has made sure of that by buying, from the Crown, a 99-year lease of Privateers' Bay—a great sweep of uninhabited hillside on Great Camanoe, the island west of his present retreat. Through a miniscule company named after *Falcon*, onlie begetter of the Batham Odyssey, he is sub-leasing sections of this land to a few Englishmen and Americans with predilections like his own. But he has kept the topmost site on Great Camanoe for himself and his wife. Michael, now twenty-three and married, with a child of his own, has another site farther down.

It is a long hot trek to the top of that hill now, through cactus and grasping thorns, rock and twisted tree-root; but one day soon, when the native builders have finished the winding road to the top, the Bathams will build a house on the roof of the Virgin Islands.

Allan Batham stands up there in the quiet heat, looking out over the brilliant sea. "The *peace* of it," he says.

In every direction you can see the islands, lying like sleeping animals on the blue-green floor that stretches to the horizon all around. It is very like looking from a high place in summer across the Outer Hebrides. And a hundred yards to the east lies the small, green-brown patch that is Marina Cay, its coral reef enwrapping it like a friendly arm.

It's a long, long way from St. James's Street, where the faces still pass each other, to and fro, every day.

© Susan Cooper 1966

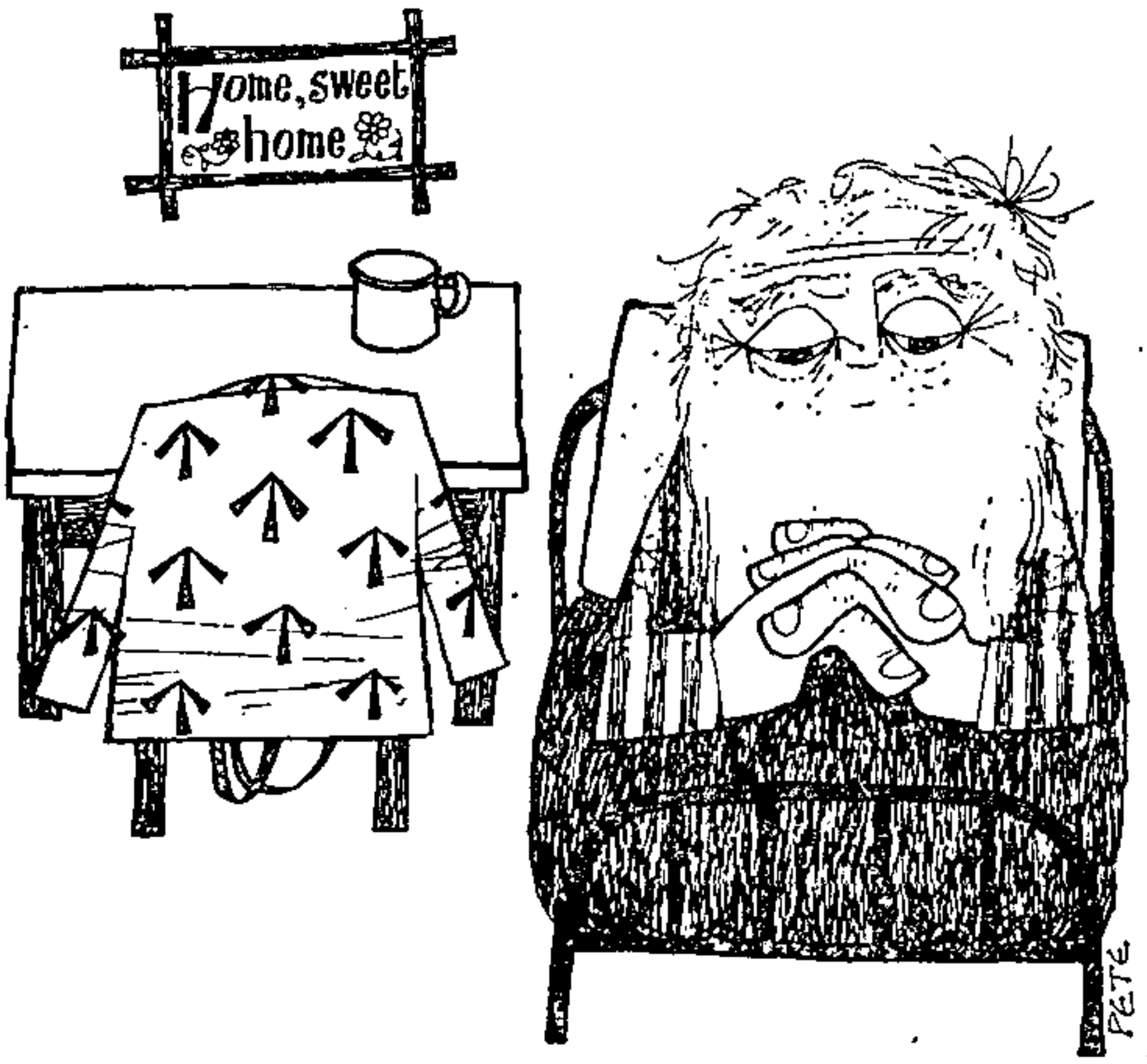
Foxer

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

MR. FRANCIS O'REILLY, known to a wide circle of enemies as Foxer, lay on his narrow prison bed thinking of old age and death. Tomorrow he would be seventy-eight! It had crept up on him unawares—like a policeman in the night. He had grown old, and never realised it. He had known, naturally enough, that he was growing older. But not that he was already old. Very old. Too old. He stroked his beard, soft as white silk, luxuriously spread on the coarse prison blanket, wavy, sumptuous, so convincingly old and virtuous that he had never thought of it as a sign of true old age, but merely as a tool of his trade, a means of convincing victims that a man with a beard like that could not conceivably be telling them a string of expensive lies.

He had had it for twenty years, tended it, loved it, seen it grow from mere pale grey to pure, angelic white, defended it with a terrible fury from a series of prison doctors and barbers, stolen the most delicate shampoos for it, kept it in defiance of reason, when its mere appearance in any police district was enough to get him arrested. In fact many a poor old bearded clergyman, going about his heavenly business in London, or Manchester, or Dublin, had suddenly become aware of some large man in plain clothes taking an unnatural interest in his innocent old face, and had felt vaguely guilty, until the detective realised it wasn't Foxer, and had turned away.

For Foxer specialised in clergymen. Catholic priests, Church of England parsons, Congregational ministers, Unitarians—he was entirely ecumenical. But at home in Ireland he was



always a priest. From the Foreign Missions. It might be South Africa. Or South America. Or China. He liked variety. And prided himself ón giving spiritual value. Many a gull who had already parted with his five-pound donation to the building fund of the Mission Church in M'Wanga, or the Convent in San Felipe in Uruguay, or the Seminary in Pei Pei, somewhere to the north of Ping Ping, had been entertained for an hour afterwards with fearsome stories of pagan darkness in Pei Pei, of the awful threat of Communistic atheism in San Felipe, or of the dreadful fate of female orphans among the Abongas. Many a hard-headed commercial traveller had wiped away a tear as he put down his contribution to the M'Wanga mission on his expenses sheet, suitably disguised as "entertainment."

And it was not entirely lies on Foxer's part. He had truly been in San Felipe. He had spent a fortnight in gaol there until he bribed his way out. And once he had actually adopted a female Abonga orphan. At least she was female, and probably an orphan. And if she wasn't an Abonga she was certainly black, and strikingly handsome in a dark and lissom way. He had found her in Liverpool, and spent three months of absolute felicity with her in Manchester, until an interfering policeman raked up an old unpleasantness and saw him off to Strangeways Gaol for two and a half years. But that was life.

His at any rate, and he had few regrets. Of the past fifty-seven years he might have, indeed he had, spent thirty-seven

in various prisons, from Wandsworth to Sing-Sing, but when he considered the way he had spent the remaining twenty years of his adult life he had no regrets at all. "Oh boy," he might have said. "The times I've had." Now, though, he had grown old and all the times were behind him, and only death in front, and it was time to make an end of folly and face the facts.

"You've got to face up to it," the Governor had said. "You're too old for it." And taking him by his frail elbow the Governor had steered him to the barred window of the Governor's office and pointed to the neat row of wooden crosses in the cemetery plot. "Unless you want to join them out there, you'll have to go straight from here on, old friend, you really will." And he had looked quite sad. Because although he was a comparatively young man—barely sixty—he and Foxer had known each other for a very long time; since the days when Foxer still worked the race trains and the Governor was a junior screw.

"You don't want to die in here, do you Foxer?" the Governor had said, because he didn't want to die in there himself, and sometimes he was afraid he would. And, indeed, neither did Foxer want to die in prison, although for rather different reasons from the Governor's. Foxer's were purely snobbish. He had been so long connected with the clergy that he had very little faith in a heavenly life beyond the grave. The grave itself was all a man could be sure of, and he had no wish to spend eternity beside some gas-meter pilferer or defaulting debtor. For years he had had his mind's eye fixed on a charming little plot in Glasnevin near the poets' corner, where his neighbours were certain to be people of intellect and conversation. All that he needed was the price of it, and his last little escapade had been connected with that very thing...

He had been spending the summer working the tourist resorts of the South West, modestly but profitably. He hadn't touched the South West for twenty-five years, and he hadn't had a beard then, so that between the natural generosity of holiday-makers, and the profound respect of Irish hoteliers for the holy cloth—perhaps they hope that it will be counted to them in Heaven against their various little occupational peccadilloes, like serving the worst coffee west of Kamschatka—he had done quite well. But collecting donations for non-existent missions, while very safe, is also a very slow way of conning

gulls, and it is almost impossible, given the cost of living, to accumulate much capital like that. By the end of the summer Foxer had enough to get him through the winter, or a fair part of it, but not a penny more. And it was then, in Tralee, in late September, that the thought of the little plot in Glasnevin came back to him. A mere hundred pounds would secure it. But it might as well have been a thousand. Nearly all the tourists had gone home.

Which meant the Bishop's Party racket. Just once more. For the plot in Glasnevin. And then, as God was his witness, never again. It had already cost him two years in Sing-Sing, three and a half in Wandsworth, and two stretches in the "Joy." But after all he had never worked it in the South West.

The next day, therefore, he went into the local branch of the Bank of Ireland, deposited five pounds, and acquired a cheque book. He then went to the largest hotel, booked a room with a private bath, had the finest dinner that the hotel could provide, ordered a bottle of twelve-year-old whiskey, and begged the manager to join him for a night-cap. He had already armed himself with a good deal of local clerical knowledge.

The manager came, and for half an hour was treated to a virtuoso display of conning—the fruit and essence of more than fifty years of expertise. Female orphans in Abonga, heart-rendingly grateful babies in Pei Pei, pathetically devout Indianos in San Felipe, held out their black and yellow and brown hands to the manager until the tears sprang to his eyes and his hand sprang to his pocket-book.

But Foxer merely shook a reproachful head. "My dear fellow," he said, "do you think I invited you up here to get a subscription for my orphans? Another time perhaps, but tonight allow me to lay aside my shepherd's cares and play host for once. Even a missionary grows tired of begging, you know, even for Holy Charity." And he tipped the last of the whiskey into the manager's glass with a sly wink of hospitality.

"And talking of playing host, I find that I am an old—" he stroked his beard, "a *very* old friend of your bishop, the good Doctor McGurk." For that was in fact the bishop's name. "We were in Maynooth together—oh, half a century ago, alas for vanished youth, vanished ambitions. *Eheu, fugaces, tempus fugit,* as our old professor of philosophy would say. Little we knew, ah little indeed, young skipping lambs of the Good Shepherd's, how it would *fugit.* And now the good Aloysius

Ten yards down the street he was arrested . . .

McGurk wears the purple, may God deal gently with him always, and I—I am what you see, my dear fellow: a humble missionary priest, begging bread for his orphans in the four corners of this generous land. But just for once, for old times' sake, I would dearly love to play host to my old friend, and his cathedral clergy. And indeed—" he winked broadly, "—I am not entirely disinterested in this, for the good Doctor can, if he wishes, favour my mission field in many ways, such as directing the thoughts of young seminarians towards the spiritual needs of my pagan orphans. Alas, we doves must be wiser than serpents if we are to survive in this world."

Which in a way was very true. And so first Foxer planned with the manager a most elaborate feast that would melt any bishop's charitable old heart—beginning with oysters and carrying on through a dozen courses to peaches *flambées* in kirsch *à la maréchale,* God forgive Foxer; accompanied by enough wines of France and the Rhineland, not to speak of twelve-year-old whiskey and ancient brandy, to sink the clergy of the entire diocese into a fit of the DTs.

"There will," said Foxer, "be about a dozen of us. Say fourteen. I would," he added roguishly, "say thirteen, if that did not verge on blasphemy. But there is one thing more. I wish to make this little party a memorable one for my old friend, and *his* old friends, for God knows whether we shall meet again this side of Paradise. And while he is certain of his entry, I, alas . . ." And he struck his breast.

"No, no," cried the manager, entirely overcome. "May God spare you both to us for many years yet; may you give many more such little parties." As well the manager might wish, for his profit on this one looked like being in the neighbourhood of fifty pounds. He and Foxer were both on the edge of weeping, and Foxer had barely voice enough left

to call for another bottle. It came, was opened, sampled, approved.

"You were saying?" prompted the manager. "You wanted to make this occasion truly memorable for our beloved bishop?"

"Ah yes!" cried Foxer, striking his forehead. "I'm glad you reminded me. I wish to buy a few little gifts for my guests, trifles of course, a missionary's wallet is seldom filled with anything but crumbs—" a sad smile, "—but trifles of taste. Pray tell me, what is the best establishment for such gifts in this estimable town?"

The manager looked extremely thoughtful, fondled his chin, and suggested a local jeweller of excellent stock and standing. The bottle was finished. And both manager and missionary —after his share of two bottles of twelve-year-old Irish whiskey Foxer *was* a missionary, heart, soul and body—both these old men toddled off to bed and slept the sleep of the truly satisfied.

Next morning Foxer strolled gently down to the recommended jewellers, told the necessary part of his story, bought a handsome pectoral cross for the bishop; a snuff box, gold and enamel, for the canon; a gold cigarette lighter for Monsignor O'Flaherty; and so on through the list of his clerical guests, to the amount of about three hundred pounds.

When all was parcelled and totted he produced his cheque book, gave the Bank of Ireland and the hotel manager as his references—not to speak of the bishop, or his own appearance —paid, if that is the word, for his purchases, and walked blithely out of the shop with loot that, properly flogged in the right quarters of Dublin, would net him a hundred cold smackers in cash. He thought he might even keep the pectoral cross for himself.

Ten yards down the street he was arrested.

When he gave evidence against Foxer at the trial, the hotel manager almost wept again—with unkind laughter. Thirty years before, he said, choking back his revengeful mirth, Foxer had caught him and the local jeweller in exactly the same way. He had been under-manager then, in a large hotel in Roscommon, and to make it worse, the jeweller had been his cousin. That time Foxer had got clean away with one hundred and fifty pounds worth of jewellery, a four-day hotel bill, five bottles of whiskey and a set of hotel towels. This time Foxer got two years in Mountjoy, the two years he was just finishing in time for his seventy-eighth birthday.

That was one of the things that had made Foxer realise that

he was indeed far too old for the profession and should retire. A con man who can no longer recognise a client he has already gulled, even thirty years earlier, has no right to stay in the business. And not much chance to, either.

The other element in Foxer's decision to retire, apart from the fear of being buried in the prison cemetery, was family feeling. It was a comparatively new growth, but with roots in an incident of almost forty years before.

He had met an Irish widow in London—handsome, well-set-up in flesh and bank account, and in a weak moment married her. The marriage, like her bank account, had lasted about a month. A sports car, a honeymoon in Antibes... moonlight on the Riviera, Monte Carlo... ah, the delights of marriage. But an angry man in Monte had recognised him and he had fled with the sports car and the remains of the bank account, and he'd never seen his wife again. And to tell the truth, he hardly ever thought of her.

Until about a year ago, a middle-aged woman with vaguely familiar features came to visit him in Mountjoy, and introduced herself as his daughter. On a later visit she brought her husband, who was a doctor of psychology and an amateur criminologist, with advanced theories of penal reform and the underlying causes of recidivism.

The doctor fell in love with Foxer at once, seeing in him the material for several papers to learned societies, and even a book on *The Latent Schizophrenia of Confidence Tricksters.* It was the doctor indeed who had persuaded his wife to visit her disgraceful old father, once the newspaper publicity had reminded him of the relationship. The wife herself, Foxer's daughter, was a dull woman, with none of Foxer's dash and imagination. But she was good-hearted, and when her husband suggested that they should make a home for Foxer she reluctantly agreed.

"What shall we tell the two boys?" was all she said, referring to Patrick and Martin, twelve and ten. "They must never know the truth." As for little Grace, five and a half, the very thought of her baby ever hearing such words as "prison" and "crime" made her blood run cold.

"We will tell them he is your great-uncle from South America," the doctor said. His mouth twitched. "He is probably well-enough used to supporting such stories with a wealth of circumstantial detail."

And so Foxer went to live with his daughter, his son-in-law

and his three grandchildren, taking to retirement with something approaching contentment. It was pleasant to stroll aimlessly in the sun, to greet the neighbours with no ulterior motives, to look young policemen fearlessly and even forbiddingly in the eye, to be able to speak of "my daughter," "my son-in-law," "my little grand-daughter, Grace." Especially her. To be no longer the lone wolf, but a belonging sheep. It was a great and oddly pleasant change. He found himself sinking into Number Ten Acacia Avenue like a tired athlete sinking into a warm bath.

And there, but for little Grace, he might well have stayed for ever. Or at least until the plot in Glasnevin received him. He was clean and quiet about the house. He gave immensely good value to the doctor, helped his daughter with the washing-up, and entertained the children at their bedtimes with elaborate stories about South America—not missionary stories, naturally, and again, he found it a relief after so long in Holy Orders to be a layman. He described lost Inca civilisations that he happened to have found, drawing on years of serious travel reading—mainly for professional purposes—in a dozen well-stocked prison libraries. He told of fantastic alligator hunts in the upper waters of the Amazon, where the piranhas ate the alligators as fast as he shot them, which was why he had failed to bring home an alligator handbag for their mother, or even a stuffed baby alligator for little Grace.

But the stories the children liked best were connected with The Treasure. "You might say," he told them, "that I have spent my life searching for that treasure." And he stroked his beard and described to them the fabled treasure-lake of the Incas high up in the Andes, still as melted glass, cold as ice, deep as the Pit of Hell itself, and guarded by monstrous swimming serpents with sabre teeth and horned, scaly heads.

"Now, now, Uncle," his daughter said, coming briskly in with Grace's cocoa—half water, half milk so as not to give her indigestion—"you'll be giving her bad dreams." And Foxer was gently but firmly ushered off to the kitchen, where there was a great deal of washing-up.

These interruptions began to happen more and more regularly. It was as though her mother's instinct dreaded the effects of fantasy on her precious chicks. Fantasy for boys meant insecurity, losing jobs, going to prison. For girls it meant bad marriages, the stage, journalism, God knew what. Although obedient to her husband, she was still a mother, and determined not to see her children ruined. She began to

drop little hints to them that their South American great-uncle, while a dear, sweet old man, was sometimes a trifle—well, imaginative.

"You mean he tells lies?" Martin said scornfully, adding, "Of course he does." And for obscure reasons this easy acceptance by the boys worried her still more.

Only Grace was both shocked and incredulous. "Oh no!" she cried. "He's true, always. He promised me. And when his money comes from South America he says he'll buy me a beautiful gold ring, just like The Treasure rings."

Indeed, Foxer had promised exactly that, in a weak moment. And he overheard this particular conversation. It worried him very much. Like two small pebbles in an otherwise very comfortable pair of shoes—his daughter's coolness, understandable, he told himself sadly, quite understandable, and his granddaughter's expectancy, also understandable, women feeling as they do about promises, even from their earliest years. But worrying to an old man whose every comfort depended increasingly on these two females. On his daughter to cook and provide for him, make his bed, mend his shirts, iron his tie (he had always been a dandy, and now that he could wear a collar and tie he liked both to be smart) and perform those thousand little functions for which God designed the female creature, and without the proper and willing performance of which a home is not much better than a prison cell, and much less peaceful. And on Grace for two or three small luxuries which he could get in no other honourable way.

He could not ask the boys to steal their father's cigars because they would have thought it wrong; but Grace thought it great fun. And for much the same reasons, and because they would have eaten all the proceeds themselves, he could not ask the boys to get him chocolate biscuits on their mother's account in the grocer's. Grace got them for him on a fifty-fifty basis, and he paid her in more and more lavish promises. A gold necklace. A doll that said, "Hello," and "Goo Goo, Mamma." A doll's house. Once, when the boys almost caught the pair of them with half a pound of chocolate wafers, he turned the threatened investigations aside with talk of an electric train.

"When?" said Patrick.

And with the biscuits melting stickily under his chair cushion Foxer said, "Christmas," without realising that Christmas was less than a month away.

From then on life became more and more difficult. Patrick

reported the promise to his mother. His mother warned him to disregard it. Martin repeated the warning to Foxer with a certain unkind mockery that cut the old man to the quick and sent Grace into hysterics. When Martin had gone, Foxer quietened Grace with more promises. And lay down that night with the realisation that if, by Christmas, he reneged on his promises, he could never face the children again. And that while the loss of Martin's and Patrick's never-very-real respect would merely hurt his pride, the loss of Grace's belief in him would be something else again.

Martin and Patrick were entirely their parents' children. But in Grace he could see, dimly and childishly, but yet distinctly, a great deal of himself. He saw it in the casual efficiency with which she robbed her father's cigar cabinet, abstracting the key from his desk almost under his nose, and returning it with one hand while stroking his work-tired brow with the other. He saw it in her mature discretion about the biscuits, never too many, never a kind her mother didn't buy for herself in case the grocer should be suspicious. He had begun to think quite seriously of passing on his immense store of experience to this grandchild of his heart and blood. Even her eyes were like his, round and blue and innocent as corn-flowers. And he too had once had curly golden hair. He stroked his beautiful beard. A woman confidence trickster. Starting at twenty with the benefit of nearly sixty years' experience behind her. She would be unique.

"Little Grace," he whispered to her one December evening, over chocolate biscuits and warm milk, "would you like me to teach you how to be a student of human nature?"

She nodded carelessly, dropping chocolate crumbs on her tartan frock. But in spite of her apparent carelessness a swiftly accurate finger wet its pink tip on her tongue and picked up every last tell-tale crumb.

"Born to it," the old man breathed. "In the blood." She'd be able to play a Missionary Sister, or a Mother Superior, to perfection. "We'll begin after Christmas," he whispered. But for lessons to be of value, the pupil must have faith in the teacher. And it was almost Christmas.

Obviously he had to keep his promises. And equally obviously, with the three and sixpence a week pocket-money that his daughter allowed him, there was only one way to do it. One last fling, before respectability claimed and tamed him for ever. He found suddenly that he was feeling ten years younger. Ten? He hadn't felt like this since he was sixty.

He went to bed for the whole weekend in order to think, undisturbed by washing-up.

Another bishop's party was out of the question. His daughter had burned his clerical gear the night he arrived and he had no money to get any more. Besides, the Archbishop of Dublin—no, not a dinner party. Then what?

Again, Grace was the finger pointing the way. Tiptoeing into his room with a book of raffle tickets from her school. Three tickets for sixpence, seven for a shilling, with a seventeen-pound turkey as first prize. "You just give me sixpence, and put your full name on that bit of the ticket there," Grace said, pointing at the counterfoil.

Your full name. Light dawned, and Foxer fell asleep with his plan already perfected.

On Monday morning, two days before Christmas, he began to operate it.

Ever since he came to the district he had gathered local gossip of a particular kind, not with any real motive, but simply out of the habit of a lifetime. Know the countryside. And among the snippets he had collected was that a certain shopkeeper in the next suburb kept his main supply of working cash not in his shop, which had once been successfully burgled, but in his private house, in a heavy safe, to which his wife had the keys during the day. In this way his cash was never left unattended. By day his wife cared for it. By night he slept beside it. And if he needed it during the day—more, that is, than the smallish float he carried to the shop each morning and home each night—he sent a messenger to his wife to fetch it to him. His business was antique furniture and expensive *bric-à-brac* which he occasionally bought in the shop itself from callers. Hence the messages to his wife for cash. It was not the wisest system perhaps, but what system is? His name was Henry Molloy. His wife's was Margaret.

At 10.30 a.m. on the Monday morning before Christmas, Foxer took Grace out on the pretext of buying her a Christmas present with his weekly three and sixpence, and from across the road loosed her, with her raffle tickets, at Mr. Molloy's antique shop.

"Whatever you do," he emphasised, "sell one to Mr. Molloy himself. Just think if one of his assistants won a turkey and he didn't!"

Five minutes later he had Mr. Henry Molloy's full signature and handwritten address on a raffle ticket counterfoil, and was rewarding Grace with a banana split. It crossed his mind

briefly that here was a whole new line of country to exploit—but he realised sadly in the next minute that there is a limit to the number of raffle tickets which even the most angelic little girl could sell in one day. Even at a shilling a time the turnover would be minute. In fact, considering the price of banana splits, one would very likely operate at a considerable loss. As it was, he barely had the bus fare home, because Grace refused to give him Mr. Molloy's shilling. But at least he had the ticket. And all that night he practised the signature and the address. The style of handwriting was quite simple and straightforward.

Next morning he presented himself to Mr. Molloy in the guise of an elderly American on a visit to relations. But alas, his visit was about to end, his age told him that he would not pass this way again—how true!—and he desired, indeed he aimed, to take back a few little souvenirs of his delightful stay to dear old Joliet—er, Illinois. Like, for example, that silver teapot.

When he began, Foxer intended to be modest. Say twenty pounds. But why be modest on a last fling? Good God, a man would have to be pretty mean-spirited to restrain his last fling to twenty pounds. "And that li'l old silver tray—is that the real McCoy?"

By the time he was done, the total of his purchases came to one hundred and ninety-seven pounds. He added a little fireside screen, "For my delightful hostess in this beautiful old city of yours, sir," to make it a nice round two hundred guineas, and came to business.

"And that li'l old silver tray . . ."

Stroking his luxurious beard he said to the obsequious Mr. Molloy: "Waal sir, two hundred guineas is a fair sum of money, such as an old man like me would be afraid to carry through the streets."

"How wise of you, sir," said Mr. Molloy.

"Equally, I guess, I cannot expect a stranger in a strange town, who happens to be leaving for the li'l ol' United States

this very afternoon, to be allowed to pay such an account by cheque . . ." Mr. Molloy made deprecatory noises.

"But if you would provide me with a piece of that stationery I see lying there, I will scribble a note to my niece and hostess, who is minding my little supply of cash. And then, if by chance you have a messenger who could save my old shanks a journey . . .?"

"Why yes!" cried Mr. M., whose never-very-dormant suspicions had been sharply aroused by the beginning of this long spiel, but which, happily, had been laid to rest by the promise of cash.

"Pray take this sheet of paper, if you will forgive it being headed by my shop address. In fact I myself can type the note for you—unless, of course, it is of too personal a nature?"

"How kind!" cried Foxer. "Just say, 'Dear Margaret,' which is my niece's Christian name—"

"What a coincidence," said Mr. M. "It's also my wife's name!"

"Then she must be a thoroughly good and delightful woman," cried Foxer. "I just know it. But I am keeping you too long," he whispered, seeing the blue shape of a police-man stroll past the door.

"Just write that I've found a couple of small bargains and need two hundred guineas. Use your own words, sir; I'm no hand at composing letters, being a self-educated mill—I mean man."

"A millionaire!" breathed Mr. M., to himself. "How could I have suspected this sweet old gentleman?" And hastily using the formula that he used when writing to his own Margaret, typed, *Dear Margaret, I have just been offered some rather interesting items. Please let me have two hundred guineas by bearer. Your loving* —— and gave it to Foxer, who swiftly signed it *Henry*, casually shading the flowing signature with his cupped hand.

"And the address?" asked Mr. M., eagerly producing an envelope.

"Why, this one in my pocket will do," said Foxer. "Waste not, want not." And producing a bundle of old letters, selected an envelope from among them.

Swiftly taking the note, he tucked it into the envelope on which he had already written Mrs. Molloy's name and address in Henry Molloy's handwriting, copying all from Grace's counterfoil.

Mr. M. called forward a spotty and cretinous messenger boy, too stupid to be dishonest or even lazy, which was why Mr. M. employed him, and Foxer, who had strolled away in order to consider an antique Windsor chair, beckoned the boy towards him.

"Take this letter to this address," he said, giving the boy the note, together with a half-crown filched from Grace's piggy bank. "And if you are back here in ten minutes, why boy, I'll make it an even dollar."

The boy sped off, not at all surprised to be sent to his master's house for it was an errand he ran at least once or twice a week.

Foxer stayed admiring this and that for a minute or two more, pleaded another errand in the neighbourhood and, promising to be back in two shakes of a donkey's tail, toddled out of the shop.

"A millionaire!" breathed Mr. M. again. "And so unaffected!"

Ten minutes later Foxer waylaid the returning messenger fifty yards up the street, took the thick envelope addressed to Henry Molloy by his loving safe-keeping Margaret, gave the boy Grace's remaining half-crown, and disappeared at a surprising speed for a man of seventy-eight.

He spent the afternoon shopping, after a long and sumptuous champagne lunch in an excellent restaurant. He bought gold rings and a necklace, electric trains, a doll's house with twenty rooms and running water, two dolls that danced and one that said, "Peek-a-boo" as well as "Mamma"; he bought tea sets, copper saucepans, delicious and exotic foods for his daughter; and two dozen Havanas and a pure silk dressing-gown for his son-in-law. He bought himself a gold cigarette lighter, and an ivory brush-and-comb set especially for his beard. When he got home that night he had four and elevenpence. He slipped it unobtrusively into Grace's piggy bank and went to bed.

The next day was Christmas Eve. And from midday onwards a succession of respectful messengers delivered a series of richly wrapped parcels to the astonished family at Number Ten Acacia Avenue.

"Open them!" cried Foxer.

And by six that evening the house was filled with coloured wrappings, squeaking children, speechless parents, and a beaming, benevolent Father Christmas of a Foxer. Water gushed out of the doll's house. Dolls cried "Peek-a-boo!" and danced

on the table. Electric trains encircled the floor at ever increasing speeds. The air was rich with Havana smoke and the subtle and exotic scents of unusual cooking.

"My life savings," Foxer breathed to his daughter, "but why save them?"

"A little legacy," he murmured to his son-in-law. "Totally unexpected."

"Football pools," he confided to Patrick and Martin. "Quite a stroke of luck."

And to Grace: "My money from South America."

At half-past six a large man in plain clothes knocked heavily at the door. Foxer answered it.

"How did you know?" he said sadly.

"The beard, Foxer," the detective said, almost equally sadly. "You're getting senile, that's what it is. As soon as old Molloy described the beard . . ."

"Be discreet," pleaded Foxer. He went inside, packed his spare false teeth, his gold cigarette lighter, his ivory brush-and-comb set, his socks and a flannel, and was ready.

To tell the truth he wasn't entirely broken-hearted. He was thoroughly sick of washing-up. And rather tired of respectability.

"Just slipping out with a friend for a moment," he murmured to the adults. "A visitor from South America," he whispered to Grace. "He wants to talk to me about The Treasure."

"I have tried my hardest," the judge said, "to find extenuating circumstances in your case, your age, the pleas of your daughter,"—not very passionate ones, it must be admitted—"the partially generous motives of your crime; but when I consider your truly appalling record . . ."

Everyone thought he was extremely lucky to get off with eighteen months. Mr. Molloy wrote an indignant letter to his parliamentary representative about it.

By the end of January Foxer was lying in his old cell, stroking his beard.

A slip of a young warder put his head round the door. "Barber, Foxer?" he cried jokingly.

"Why yes," Foxer said. "I think I will. I find this beard *is* inclined to irritate my chin at times."

And as he sat in the barber's chair, submitting to the razor, his mind was already eighteen months ahead . . .

© Brian Cleeve 1965

WILLIAM SAROYAN

THE CRAZY LADY IN THE RED BIKINI

SHE was like a windmill, six feet, and six arms, too, all of them moving clockwise and counter-clockwise at the same time, while a hard, broken voice clattered steadily in French, on the platform at Gare Saint-Lazare.

"Wow," Joe said. "Marry *her*, Pop. Why not be a daredevil?"

"Let's just find Car A, Seats 1 and 2, and shut up, shall we?"

"You're going soft from not being married, Pop, that's all."

We took our seats by the window, lifted the wall table, so I could put a book there, and we were as good as on our way back to San Francisco, after two months in Europe. The book was a gift from Joe—*Origins of the Second World War* by A. J. P. Taylor. He'd paid the French equivalent of six dollars for it at Brentano's on Avenue de l'Opéra.

There was nobody else in the compartment, and then a porter with a suitcase, a satchel, and a briefcase arrived, followed by the owner of the luggage—a Heidelberg man, most likely, because there was a great scar on the left side of his face, from the end of his mouth to his ear. He tipped the porter, smiled, nodded to Joe and me, and took his place.

For a minute there was no talk and then the Heidelberg man said, "I make it one minute after five. Is that correct?"

"Two," Joe said.

"Thank you."

He put his watch ahead a minute, and then Joe said, "You going to the boat?"

"Oh yes. Everybody on this train is."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. This is the train to the *Hanseatic*."

There was no more talk for about a minute, and then for some reason Joe jumped up and brought down the window. Through the open window came the voice of the woman. Joe sat down, folded his hands, and shut his eyes.

"What's that for?"

"Just a poor boy's prayer at train-time."

"What kind of a prayer?"

"For his daddy over there."

Joe opened his eyes, unfolded his hands, and listened, as if for the rare song of a rare bird. And then *wham!*—the slide door of the compartment came open, almost *apart*, and there in the doorway stood the woman, blood in her eye, and the French language in her mouth. Joe looked up and nodded thanks.

The old porter put her stuff up on the rack, but she didn't like the way he had done it, so he moved them in accordance with her instructions. She fished around in her snap purse, found two small coins and handed them to the old man. He glanced at them quickly, was about to point out that the rate was one new franc per bag and she had had three bags, so where was the full amount? But he decided against it. He decided he would just rather go away.

Joe, watching out of the corner of his eye, smiled and looked at me, but I was reading the book. Joe's hand fell on the page, so I *had* to see what he wanted.

Soundlessly he shaped the words, Marry her.

Soundlessly I shaped my reply: Shut up.

Now, the woman stepped out into the corridor to be with the young man and the young man's wife or girl, who were seeing her off. There was a flurry of laughter and much swift chatter, but only from the woman. The man and his girl, both French, replied in easy English. They looked at their watches and moved to get off the train. She went with them, and the man from Heidelberg, courteous and reserved, looked around, a little anxiously it seemed, and then far away.

"Pop," Joe whispered, "if you don't marry her, this man will."

The German shut his eyes and murmured something that sounded like "Ahkh." He listened to the woman's voice coming from the end of the car and got ready for her return, drawing himself in as deeply as possible.

She reached for the handle of the slide door, to bring it open, but it was already open, so the handle was on the other side. She found the handle and *shut* the door, shouting all the while to her friends who were standing on the platform. After shutting the door, shutting herself out of the compartment, she knew there was only one thing to do, open it, so she opened it, and came in.

She asked a question in French of the man from Heidelberg, who replied in courteous English, "The seat in the corner is place six, I believe."

She thanked him roundly, and then shouted something at Joe about the window, and Joe said, "Yes, ma'am, you can stand at the window, but we speak *English*, too."

She came bearing down on the window, reached up, seized the blind, brought it down, shutting out the light from the station, rushed the blind back up, looked for the window handle, and nearly fell out of the open window.

"I thought you could *see* the window was already open," Joe said.

In French the woman shouted to her friends, and then almost as if she were still speaking to them she asked if she might lower the table, so that she could stand nearer to the window, and be nearer to her friends for the adieu. But without waiting for a reply she seized the edge of the folding table, lifted it, and then began to lower it.

"My leg," Joe said. "Let me get my leg out of here first, please."

She waited for Joe to get his leg free, and then she slammed the table against the wall and stood between Joe and me, right up against the lower frame of the window. Looking down, I saw two enormous feet in very pointed shoes with very high heels. There were three pink (but dirty) plasters on each of her heels.

The locomotive shrieked and the train began to move. The woman waved and shouted, and leaned out of the window, and began to throw kisses. At last the train was out of the station, but still she stood there, apparently in some kind of reverie.

Joe brought a red apple out of his coat pocket and I was sure he was going to bite into it, because I had got him around to the idea that an apple was a lot more sensible to eat between meals than candy. He rubbed the apple on his sleeve until it was all sparkling bright and then he said to the woman, "Would you like an apple?"

Without looking at Joe she replied in French. Joe put the apple back in his pocket, and after about two full minutes the woman turned away from the window, found place six, and then deliberately sat down in place four, directly in front of the man from Heidelberg, who instantly shut his eyes.

She was in her late thirties, and he was in his early fifties, but he preferred to have his eyes shut. She half-shut her own, perhaps in order to dream back to some of the precious stuff she was taking home with her from Europe.

Joe handed me the apple and moved his head slightly in her direction, by which he meant that I was to offer it to her. Instead, I took a big bite out of it, and Joe shook his head, terribly disappointed.

Suddenly she blew her nose, and the startling noise of it brought open the eyes of the man from Heidelberg. Where was she? Ah, there she was, directly across from him. He got up and went out into the corridor, and then down to the end of the car. He was gone five minutes. When he came back, Joe almost knocked the book out of my hands, because he wanted me to notice how this man was meeting the challenge of the woman. How he had got himself comfortable and neat, his hair moistened and carefully combed. All the same, the German did not take his proper place in the compartment, he took a place that kept him from being directly across from the woman whose face was now quite red and better than half wet, from sweat.

Now, one by one, the train and passport people began to come to the compartment, all of them speaking English, but the woman still spoke only French. The difficulty was that she wasn't easy to understand. Somebody wanted to know if she had any French money. She brought out a secret wallet and in French counted the paper in it. There appeared to be the equivalent of almost eight dollars. The man thanked her and said that that was quite all right.

"I have more," she said, "in coins."

"It does not matter."

"And several *lire*."

"Yes," the man said and went off.

The woman's reverie continued for almost an hour, whereupon she removed her shoes.

Joe got up and went out into the corridor.

Before he took off he said without making a sound, Sexy, too.

She was soon fast asleep, her long legs across the space

between the seats, the toes wiggling inside the stockings in some kind of punctuation to the events of her sleep. The man from Heidelberg stepped over her and went out into the corridor, and for a moment I was afraid she would wake up and speak to me in French. And then, without waking up, she spoke in English: "Aren't the fumes from the locomotive just a little *too much* for an open window?"

"I hadn't noticed, but if you mean you'd like the window shut, okay."

I shut the window, stepped over her, and went out into the corridor. The slide door had been left open from the beginning. The minute I was out of the compartment, she slammed the slide door shut. I went down to where Joe was standing at an open window.

"*Did you make a pass at her or anything?*" he said.

"She bawled me out for having the window open. Where'd the German go?"

"Back to the lav, I guess. Pop, he's putting hair oil on right now, and he's out to get her before you do. Are you going to let the Germans beat us again?"

"How come you bought me that particular book? *How the Second World War Started.*"

"*ORIGINS of the Second World War*, Pop. By A. J. P. Taylor."

"Yes. Well, how come you picked *that* book?"

"Don't you like it?"

"So far it makes me feel kind of silly."

"Why?"

"Well, according to the book, the whole thing was unnecessary."

"So what? What's that got to do with you?"

"Well, I was *in* it—for three years."

"Who *wasn't*?"

"Precisely."

"Now, look, Pop. The war's over. Go on back in there and see if she bawls you out some more. If she does, marry her."

"*You* go on back in there."

"*Me*? Hell, Pop, it's against the law for an American boy of eleven to marry a woman of sixty-six."

"She's in her middle thirties, I believe."

"Pop, I'm proud of you. You're sticking up for her. Anybody can see you like her. Well, don't let her get away. Don't let somebody else beat you to her. Here's this German

putting oil on his hair right now. Are you going to let him steal your girl?"

"I'll go back in if you'll go with me."

"Oh no, Pop, you've got to go back alone."

"I'm afraid to go back alone."

"Not *you*, Pop. Go on back in there and be charming."

The German came up the corridor and Joe said, "Beat him to her, Pop. Don't let him back in there first. Smell the hair oil?"

But the German didn't go back in there. He went up to the other end of the car where there was a window at which nobody was standing. He lowered the window and stood there. He stood there three hours, all the way to Le Havre, as Joe and I stood at our window.

When we got to our cabin on the *Hanseatic*, it was almost half-past eight and our steward said we could go straight to the dining room for supper because it wouldn't be necessary to be assigned to a table until tomorrow. We went to the dining room, and there she was, ordering supper in French.

She was at a round table that was set for six, and Joe said, "Pop, this is Fate, if I ever saw it. I'll take this little table in the corner, but you go sit across from her and for heaven's sake be charming, will you?"

The woman was bawling out the fat *maître d'hôtel*, two waiters were picking up dishes and going away with them, and two other waiters were coming back with other dishes; and the woman was telling them all precisely what she wanted and how she wanted it, in French. They were whispering replies in English.

Joe and I sat down at the table for two in the corner, and somebody pushed over a cart loaded with little things to eat, so we chose six each, and then the woman screamed and leapt to her feet.

"Soup," Joe said. "Somebody spilled soup all over her. Go on over and comfort her, Pop. That German's around here somewhere, and the first thing you know he'll be over there with a great big napkin mopping up the *minestrone*."

The German *was* around, as a matter of fact—hidden behind a copy of the London *Times*. I saw him lower the paper when she screamed.

The *maître d'hôtel* hurried to the lady, apologised, and worked quickly with four napkins. After a few minutes she sat down again, and dinner proceeded.

And then suddenly the *maître d'hôtel* was up in the air.

"But madam," he said, "this is the dining room for first-class passengers only."

This hurt Joe. He couldn't swallow.

"Pop, they're really trying to give her the brush-off. Be gallant, will you? Go on over there and tell that *maître d'hôtel* not to be such a snob. Let her know that you love her."

The *Maître d'hôtel* escorted her to the door, and out.

"You're not a gentleman, Pop."

The next afternoon we stood on the boat deck in a cool drizzle, looking down where the pool was. Well, it was empty, and there was a rope netting over it, so of course none of the usual shipboard swimmers were around.

And then suddenly, from somewhere down below, a bright parasol came into view, and holding the parasol was the woman.

In a bikini.

"Wow," Joe said.

It was surely only a coincidence that the German took sick at that moment, hanging over the rail, because he hadn't even been looking in that direction.

"There he is again, acting irresistible," Joe said. "Pop, you've got to do something about that guy from Heidelberg. Before this voyage is over he's going to *win* her. Look at him trying to attract her attention."

The woman called out to the deck steward who quickly set up a folding chair beside the dry pool. She sat down just as the drizzle began to fall, but then of course she had her parasol and so it didn't make any real difference.

Joe and I got out of the rain and went to the bar and began to play casino.

"How's the book, Pop?"

"I don't think I understand it."

"Marry her. You don't have to understand *everything*."

"Deal, will you? We've got six more days."

Joe shuffled and dealt, and the waiter brought over a lemonade for Joe and a whisky for me.

The ship moved on, the world moved on, the people in the world moved on, but none moved on with the awesome majesty and electrical violence of the crazy lady in the red bikini who always spoke French.

© William Saroyan 1965

HAT TRICKS

"If he be not in love with some woman there is no believing old signs: he brushes his hat o' mornings: what should that bode?"

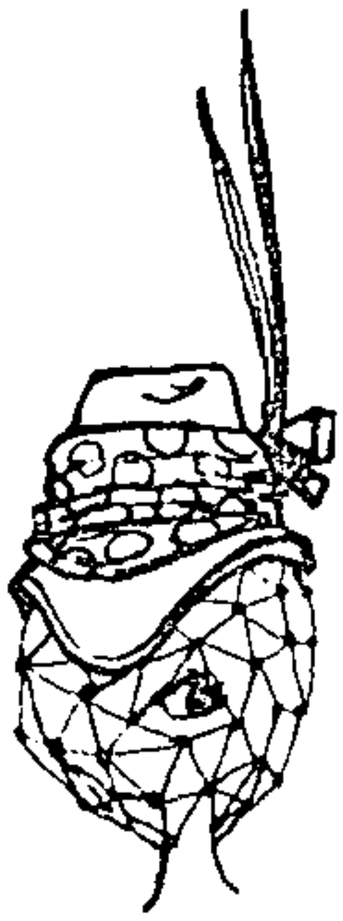
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Much Ado About Nothing*

IF YOU WANT TO GET AHEAD . . .

There is no more apt or incontrovertible definition of a human being than "one who wears a hat." Chimpanzees do not wear hats (at least in a state of nature); nor, we may safely assume, did our ape-like ancestors; but primitive man, even when otherwise naked, never dispensed with some form of headdress. The wrangles of anatomists over the distinctive attributes of the human skeleton are inconclusive; but the instinct to adorn the head, whether with cow-dung paste or a boater, is sure proof of human status.

MARY EDEN, *The History of the Hat*

Male Angle



Darling, what is that?
That, angel, is a hat.
Are you positive? Are you certain?
Are you sure it's not a curtain?
Shall you really place your head in it?
How's for keeping cake or bread in it?
Do not wear it on your head;
Find some other use instead.
Say a cloth for drying dishes,
Or a net for catching fishes.
Darling, what is that?
Are you sure it is a hat?

OGDEN NASH, *The Drop of a Hat*

VINTAGE MODEL

When I speak of the country hat I mean not the hat in which a countryman goes to town or to church, but the hat he wears when he is engaged on some such mighty enterprise as looking into a field over a five-barred gate, coming from the well with two buckets of water, or rubbing a few ears of corn in his fist to test their ripeness. The type of hat I have in mind improves with age, and its original colour and shape are faults that it must grow out of. When it is fully mature it has the bleached softness of lichen, and no brim to speak of. It may have a ribbon, but more often than not it has a lighter band where the ribbon used to be. It has no more landmarks than a bowl, and only the man who wears it can tell the back from the front.

J. D. SHERIDAN, *While the Humour is on Me*

THE KING AND THE QUAKER

It was a point of principle with the early Quakers not to remove the hat as a mark of respect but to remain covered, even in the presence of royalty. The story goes that on one occasion William Penn came into the room where Charles II was standing and kept his hat on; whereupon Charles removed his own hat. "Friend Charles," said Penn, "why dost thou uncover thy head?" "Friend Penn," answered Charles with a smile, "it is the custom here that only one person wears his hat in the king's presence."

Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable

Status Symbol

The Hat, of course, was bought for the subjection of Greenwood. He understood that without a silk hat he could not advance upon a lordly editor, and from first to last it was used entirely for this purpose every few weeks. It never fitted him—he does not know his size in hats to this day—it was not so much worn as poised on his head, and if, in his walk to or from the St. James's office near Bouverie Street, he suddenly stopped, it as suddenly fell off. He had, however, religious faith in it.

J. M. BARRIE, *The Greenwood Hat*

Caps in Hand

"I think I'd like a cap," I said, though why I cannot imagine.

"Caps? Certainly, sir. There you are," he cried, but without stirring from his seat behind me. But there I was indeed, for the counter, right under my nose, was now heaped with caps. A moment before there had not been a single cap in sight. His voice came over my shoulder again: "Nice lot of caps there, sir," he was saying complacently. I cannot say they were a nice lot of caps, and I remember that I did not like the look of them at the time. They were all very large and loud and had enormous flaps, so that they appeared to have been designed for persons who were not sure whether to stalk a deer or attend a cup-tie. J. B. PRIESTLEY, *The Strange Outfitter*

THE BOWLER

The bowler is man's crowning glory. Pay no attention to the cynic who says: "If we were intended to wear bowlers we should have been born in them."

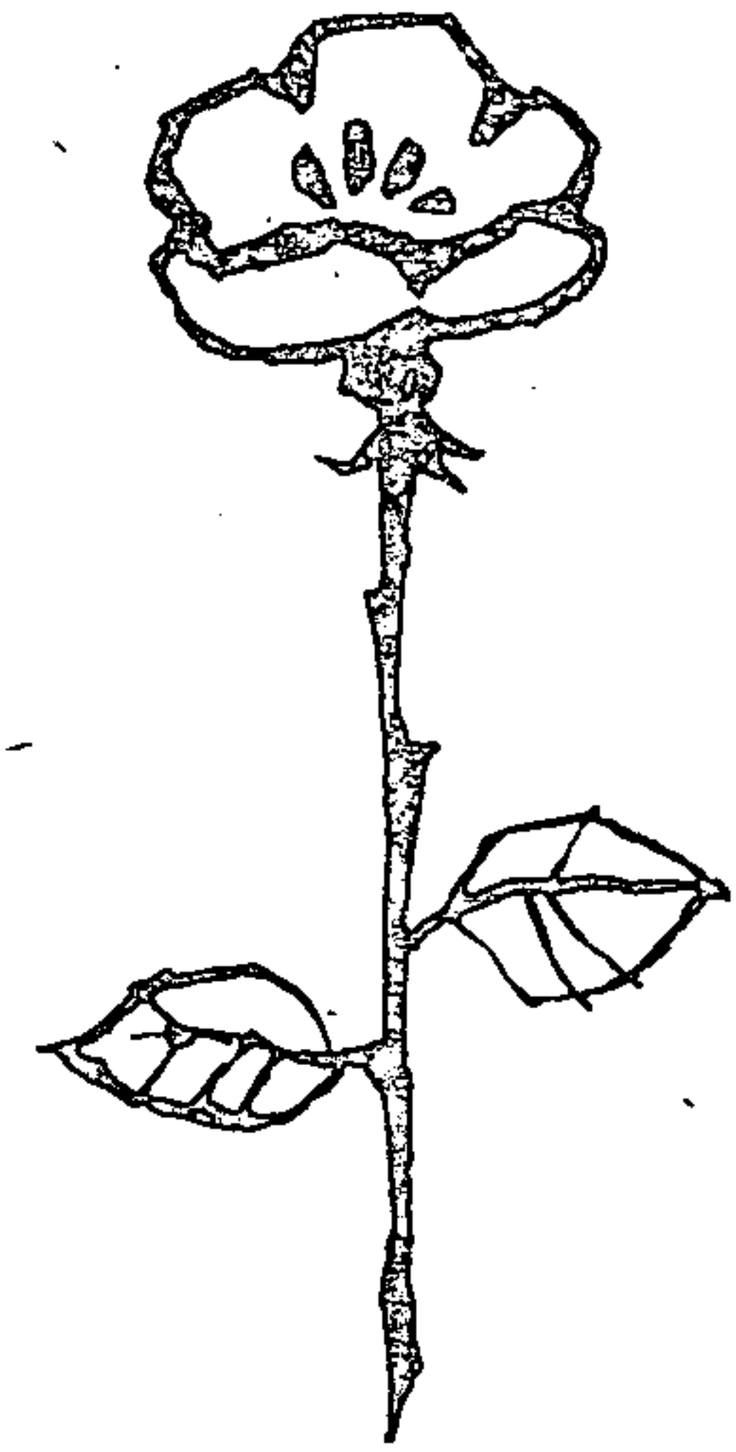
He is merely showing that contempt for pleasure which distinguishes Antisthenes. I see that hatters want to encourage more men to wear hats. They should use as advertisement a picture of a girl in a meadow turning away from a bare-headed man: "Oh, Ralph, why can't you wear a bowler like Claude's?"

"BEACHCOMBER," *Daily Express, November 14, 1964*

Love-knot

Tying her bonnet under her chin,
She tied her raven ringlets in;
But not alone in the silken snare
Did she catch her lovely floating hair.
For, tying her bonnet under her chin,
She tied a young man's heart within.

NORA PERRY



by WILLIAM SCOTT

WILSHAW GIRL

He couldn't take a strong line, even if his life depended on it. . .

I HAD finished the morning post and was waiting until it was time to go into the weekly conference, when Clyde came into my office. He wanted to discuss some points that would come up at the conference. But we never did get around to that.

What happened was that a call came through for me and while I was on the phone he picked up the morning paper from my desk and glanced through it.

"This is interesting," he said, when I had finished.

He showed me a picture in the paper. The main caption was *Canada's H. G. Dunbar Arrives for Trade Conference* and the photo was of him and his wife at London Airport.

"I know Dunbar," Clyde said. "Or rather, I used to know him. His wife, too. What a laugh! See what it says there —'Mr. Dunbar is expected to take a strong line with British manufacturers in regard to reciprocal trade with Canada.'"

"Why is that a laugh?"

"He couldn't take a strong line if his life depended on it. He's weak. Always has been weak."

I looked at the news story that went with the picture. "He can't be all that weak if he's head of one of the biggest department-store groups in Canada."

"He got that through his father."

"How do you know?"

"I told you—I used to know him."

"Where?"

"In Canada."

"I didn't know you'd been to Canada."

"Quite a while back. Just after the war. But I wasn't there long. I didn't like the place."

"What makes you say he's a weak man?"

"I'll tell you."

And this is what Clyde told me.

He was still in his twenties after the war and he decided to go and have a look at Canada with a view to settling there, possibly. He had used his army gratuities to get there but, dollar restrictions being what they were at that time, he had the problem of how to live while seeking a job. However, this did not worry Clyde unduly. He sought out a family in Toronto named Wilshaw and stayed with them. They were, in a small way, indebted to him. When they had been on a pre-war visit to England, his family had been helpful to them.

Dr. Wilshaw was no longer alive. The family consisted of his widow, two daughters and a son. The doctor had had a fairly good practice and the money he left, plus his insurance, had enabled Mrs. Wilshaw to keep on their house in one of the better parts of Toronto and their summer place at Muskoka. At the time when Clyde went to stay with them she felt that she was managing quite well. She had the son, Bob, at college studying to be a doctor like his father. The elder daughter, Mary, had just made a good marriage to a young stockbroker with a worthwhile future ahead of him and she had high hopes for the other daughter, Janet.

The Wilshaws—the mother, Janet and the son—were at their Muskoka cottage when Clyde joined them. It wasn't the best of places from which to be job-hunting, since it was up at the lakes, a hundred miles or so from Toronto. But Clyde realised he had chosen a bad time—August—to make the move to Canada in search of a job. At the height of the debilitating Canadian summer little real business was conducted. All anybody really thought about was getting away to the lakes until the cooler weather came and the big business firms functioned at full pressure again. So, although he perhaps felt self-conscious about living with the Wilshaws at Muskoka instead of more earnestly going after work, he made the most of the pleasant life at the lake.

For her part, Mrs. Wilshaw did not greatly mind that he

was to all intents having a holiday at her expense. She felt that Clyde, being English, had had a tough war, much tougher than anything Canadians at home had experienced. Besides, he was a personable young man of good background from one of the better English public schools. Handsome in the best English tradition. Intelligent. Therefore a guest who quite impressed the people around the lake.

Of the two Wilshaw daughters, Janet was the beauty. Her looks and personality were such that she was referred to as "the Wilshaw girl," as though the elder sister didn't exist. Mary was not such a bad-looking girl, but by contrast to Janet she was nondescript.

Janet was a golden girl. Her very fair hair bleached naturally in the hot summer sun to the most striking blonde shade. Her smooth skin tanned to a delicious honey colour. Her breasts in a bathing suit were seen to be small and firm of contour. She had a slim waist and coltish legs. Her teeth were perfect and they glistened in the sun when she smiled. By any standards, she was a knockout.

Not unnaturally, from her teens onwards she had had dozens of admirers. When Clyde went to stay with the Wilshaws she was twenty-four and the phone was always going for her. At meal times when Janet got up to answer it, Mrs. Wilshaw would hush those at the table so that she could overhear more clearly. She always wanted to know who was at the other end, the better to follow the conversation. "Say the name," she would call to Janet, "say the name!"

But these young men who phoned were usually those who had newly met Janet and were not familiar with the situation. They didn't know that she was in effect engaged to Harvey Dunbar. She didn't always let them know. She liked attention and she was in no hurry to cut herself off from all those would-be suitors as she would inevitably have to do when she married Harvey.

Harvey worked in the footwear department of the main store of the Rennie and Dunbar group. But that was only a temporary matter. His father was chairman and biggest shareholder of Rennie and Dunbar's. Harvey was merely serving his time before becoming an executive and eventually taking over the chairmanship from Dad.

The Dunbars had a place across the lake—a summer mansion rather than a summer cottage like the Wilshaws. Harvey would breeze over in his boat to call on Janet or to collect her to go off somewhere. He inclined towards a

double-breasted blue blazer and cream flannels, and he topped this off with a yachting cap.

Clyde felt that in dress and manner Harvey was rather old for his years—to the point of being stuffy. But doubtless he already felt the responsibility of inherited wealth and position to come. Clyde found him quite impossible to talk to and concluded that this was because they had so little in common. But he noticed also that Harvey was no great talker among the Wilshaws or with other people he knew well.

At first, Clyde was willing to abide by the fact that Janet was spoken for. He had come too late on the scene. In a short while she would be marrying Harvey. It was a match which pleased Mrs. Wilshaw immensely, a highwater mark in her ambitions for her children. It pleased Janet because she would have wealth, a fine home and everything she wanted from life. And Harvey was happy about it because he would have as his wife a rare beauty to add the final touch to the good things of life that were his.

So Clyde reasoned that against such odds what chance had he, jobless, with no foreseeable prospects for the future, immediate or long-term? Therefore, as far as feminine company was concerned, he concentrated on the other chicks round the lake. His interest in Janet he confined to admiring her from afar, or rather at close quarters when she sunbathed on the jetty with as little of her bathing suit covering her as was decent.

One day he was able to admire even more of her. He had got into the boat at the jetty to go fishing and, as he started the outboard, he happened to glance up at the cottage and there was Janet in her room, having just had a swim and changing to go out. She was naked. Clyde at once switched off the outboard and went through the motions of having difficulty with it. He wasn't sure, but he felt that Janet must know he could see her from the boat.

Clyde thought about this afterwards and wondered whether she was in effect saying, "For heaven's sake do something about me." But you never knew with girls. They were extremely difficult to read and if he had decided to do something about her he may have found that he was quite mistaken. It could have led to a fine old how-d'-ye-do, with Mrs. Wilshaw suggesting acidly that he had best pack up and go. So he decided to leave well alone.

However, the decision was taken out of his hands one night shortly after that.

It was a close, oppressive night. Young Bob was away, Mrs. Wilshaw had long since gone to bed and Janet was out with Harvey. Clyde slept on the screened-in porch, where normally it was cooler, but this night, despite the fact that he had pushed the covers down to the end of the bed and had only a sheet over him, he found he just couldn't get to sleep in the stifling atmosphere. He got up and went through to the kitchen to have a cold drink.

He was surprised when Janet suddenly appeared.

"I didn't hear the car," he said.

"Harvey dropped me up at the road."

"You had to walk down? That wasn't very gracious of him."

"We've had a row."

"Oh."

She had started to make coffee but now emptied the water from the percolator and settled for a glass of milk. She was obviously in an agitated state.

"What was it about?"

"The row? Oh, I don't know," she said unhappily.

She gulped at the milk, then sat on a stool looking down dejectedly into her glass as she twirled it in her hand.

"Oh, well," he said, "it'll all probably be patched up tomorrow."

"It won't. This was a humdinger of a row."

Clyde had finished his drink. He waited a moment or two, but when she showed no sign of wanting to enlarge on the subject he said goodnight and went back to the porch.

Five minutes later she came and got into bed with him.

Clyde didn't quite know what to make of this. Usually if a girl comes to your bed the inference is that love-making will follow.

As it turned out, Janet was in fact seeking verbal solace from Clyde. She wanted to talk about how unhappy she was and, with her lying there beside him in her thin silk dress, they talked, in whispers because their voices could carry along to Mrs. Wilshaw's open window.

However, two young people cannot lie indefinitely in such juxtaposition without some sort of emotional wave being transmitted.

He kissed her. Her reaction was immediate and impassioned. "I've so wanted you to kiss me," she said.

But in a little while Clyde was not too absorbed to notice some movement out on the lawn. It was Mrs. Wilshaw.

Quickly he reached for the covers and pulled them up, and Janet eased herself down the bed so that it was only his head showing on the pillow. He kept an air vent so that she could breathe and up from below came the delicious smell of her hair and her perfume, her body snuggled against his, as he watched Mrs. Wilshaw.

Canadian summer nights being so oppressive, people often stroll down to the lake in search of a breath of air. But Clyde felt pretty sure that that was not entirely what Mrs. Wilshaw was up to and this was confirmed by the fact that she kept glancing up to his bed.

It was obvious what had happened. Mrs. Wilshaw had been awakened by what she thought was the sound of voices and concluded that Janet was home. On getting up and investigating however, there was no sign of Janet. But surely she had heard voices? Had they been coming from the porch? Oh no, it couldn't be so. Janet couldn't be with Clyde on the porch.

Clyde knew Mrs. Wilshaw well enough to know that she was not the sort who would take the bull by the horns, go out through the living room on to the porch and say: "Is Janet here?" If it proved that she were not there, it would all be too terribly embarrassing. So instead she had decided to do some detective work, covering it up by the logical stroll on the lawn for some air.

Clyde and Janet under the covers lay perfectly still if somewhat overheated—he could feel the beads of perspiration on her brow against his bare chest. But at length Mrs. Wilshaw appeared to have satisfied her curiosity. She became lost to sight around the corner of the cottage, presumably returning to bed.

Naturally that ended activity for the night, as regards Clyde and Janet. Their main concern now was how she was going to get to her room undetected. They waited for a while and then she decided she would have to have a go at it and trust to luck.

She went off, shoes in hand, and Clyde stood breathlessly by the porch entrance, listening. In a moment he heard Mrs. Wilshaw's voice.

"Is that you, Janet?"

"Yes, Mother."

"I didn't hear the car."

"Harvey dropped me up at the road."

"What on earth for?"

"We've had a row."

"What about...?"

Clyde crept back to his bed. All was well.

A couple of days later the rift between Janet and Harvey was mended and their courtship resumed its smooth course. Clyde regarded Janet's visit to the porch as a pleasurable episode and nothing more—a girl under stress letting her barriers down momentarily and that was all there was to it. But that was not all there was to it...

Shortly afterwards, when he and Janet were making their way along a quiet part of the wooded lakeshore after collecting the mail, he let his mind dwell on how nice it had been making love to her and he tried to kiss her again. No, she said, that night had merely been a combination of circumstances—feeling sorry for herself and he being there to turn to, the relaxing effect of the mellow evening and perhaps also she had had a little too much to drink at the party she had been to...a non-repeating set of circumstances. But his powers of persuasion were such that she didn't remain dogmatic about it and the sylvan interlude that ensued was followed by others.

But no matter how discreet two young people in Clyde's and Janet's circumstances may be, those close at hand cannot help suspecting that something is going on; and Harvey, not to put too fine a point on it, became testy. He didn't say anything or do anything about what were obviously the suspicions he harboured. Another man might have confronted Clyde and said: "What the hell do you think you're up to?" There could have been a showdown, even fisticuffs. But Harvey, being a negative sort of person—in this type of situation anyway—took no positive action about it. Not for the time being, at any rate.

Mrs. Wilshaw was greatly disturbed. She didn't need any concrete evidence to know what was going on. Mothers can detect these things in their daughters' faces. Doubtless she had long talks to Janet about it, saying what a fool she was to act that way. But, like Harvey, Mrs. Wilshaw said nothing to Clyde.

With no safety valve being let off, the atmosphere was, to say the least, tense. So when the summer had ended and the Wilshaws moved back into town Clyde realised, when at last he got a job, that it was by far the best thing for him to move into lodgings of his own.

Janet was able to come and see him there—frequently. They could not very well go out and about together for fear of being seen by people who would report back to Harvey or Mrs. Wilshaw. Janet planned her visits with the help of a girlfriend who provided alibis for her.

But it was a secret far too good for any girl to keep to herself. Eventually it became known what was happening. It must have, because one evening when Janet was supposed to be visiting her friend there was a knock on Clyde's door. Out in the hall was Harvey.

Harvey looked beyond Clyde into the room and saw Janet. Clyde had no option but to let him in.

It was a strange sort of scene, as such scenes go. Harvey said practically nothing to Clyde, virtually ignoring him. What he said during the set-to was directed almost entirely at Janet.

"This is the end, it's all washed up between us," was his parting sally as he strode out.

There, for the time being, Clyde's story ended as far as telling me about it in my office was concerned. It had come up to conference time and we had to take ourselves off there. I didn't hear the rest of it until Clyde and I had lunch.

"A couple of months after that business at my boarding house," he said, "I left Canada and came back to England. The job I had wasn't any good and I didn't like Canada. Not my cup of tea at all. They're so provincial over there and—"

"So what happened?" I asked. I knew Clyde had never married, so he and Janet linking up didn't feature in it. "Presumably Harvey and Janet made things up again after your little intrusion and got married."

"Good heavens, no!"

"But his wife in that picture in the paper—isn't that Janet?"

"No."

"But when you said you'd known Harvey Dunbar and his wife I naturally concluded—"

"It was a girl named Natalie he married. I did know her. She had always been hanging around hopefully and Harvey married her on the rebound. She didn't look unlike Janet. I suppose men always go for the same type. But not a patch on Janet. Also, she liked her drink, even then. More so now, apparently. She's a lush. An alcoholic, in fact. Harvey has a hell of a time with her."

"How do you know?"

"Friend of mine was over in Canada not long ago. I told him if he was in the Toronto area to ask around about Harvey and Janet. I was interested, naturally."

"Naturally. What became of Janet?"

"Oh, she's married to some chap. Got three kids. He's in public relations or a business consultant or something like that. But he's no great shakes, as far as I can gather. She's had a pretty rough time of it, it seems. Poor Janet."

"And Mrs. Wilshaw?" I asked.

"Oh, she died some time back."

I looked at Clyde. "The whole thing probably killed her."

"What!"

I had smiled when I said it, but I wasn't entirely joking. I asked Clyde: "Why didn't Harvey and Janet patch things up, as they had before?"

"I don't know."

"Surely, when you left, all could have been forgiven and forgotten?"

"Probably Harvey by then had decided she wasn't the sort of girl he wanted to marry, sleeping around the place. In actual fact she wasn't like that at all. She didn't sleep around."

"She slept with you."

"Well, yes. But that was sort of different. She was a nice girl. Really terrific."

"Well, if she was so terrific, why didn't you marry her?"

"Oh, no!"

"Were you in love with her?"

"No, I wasn't in love with her. It was rather nice, our—association. She was so sort of eager and questing, is that the word? But I wasn't in love with her. She wasn't really my type."

So he had had his fun and games and hadn't cared a jot about the outcome. I said to him: "Why did you do it?"

"I'll tell you why I did it. It's quite simple. It gave me a feeling of power."

He paused, then went on: "You see, I had nothing. And no immediate prospects. Harvey had everything. Money and a lovely future ahead of him. But I beat him. I was stronger than he was."

"And that gave you a sense of achievement?"

"Certainly it did."

"But what sort of achievement is it to wreck people's lives?"

"Oh, come off it. I didn't wreck anybody's life."

"Do you think this Harvey fellow is happy married to an alcoholic? Is Janet happy married to a man who you say doesn't amount to much? And Mrs. Wilshaw, after all she'd done—"

"But they were weak. Harvey was weak and so was Janet. If she'd had any sense she'd have realised what side her bread was buttered on and not let herself get side-tracked. Mrs. Wilshaw could have stepped in at any time."

"But, Clyde, they weren't necessarily *weak*. Not everybody in this world is a dominant type, like you. Most people just like to go their way quietly. What does one achieve by asserting oneself against them? Why not just leave them alone?"

Clyde laughed. "Are you giving me a sermon?"

"Not a sermon. I just feel a bit sorry for Harvey and Janet."

"Because of me? Why blame me? If people can't look out for themselves, why blame anybody else? If I'd have been in Harvey's shoes I wouldn't have just stood by, the way he did."

"He's probably a decent enough fellow. In business he's probably right on the ball and—"

"In other words, I'm not a decent fellow?"

"I didn't say that."

There was an awkward pause. I thought it best to get off this subject before it developed into personal animosity. I didn't know Clyde all that well, since he had only recently joined the firm. I had not been greatly taken by him. Less now.

I got the talk on to something else and our lunch finished without any more discussion of Harvey Dunbar and Janet. If Clyde was resentful of what I had said he didn't show it, although the rest of our conversation didn't exactly go with what one would call a swing.

Outside the restaurant, Clyde paused and said: "I'm not going back to the office. I've got to get started on the Kilburn area this afternoon."

"Oh, yes."

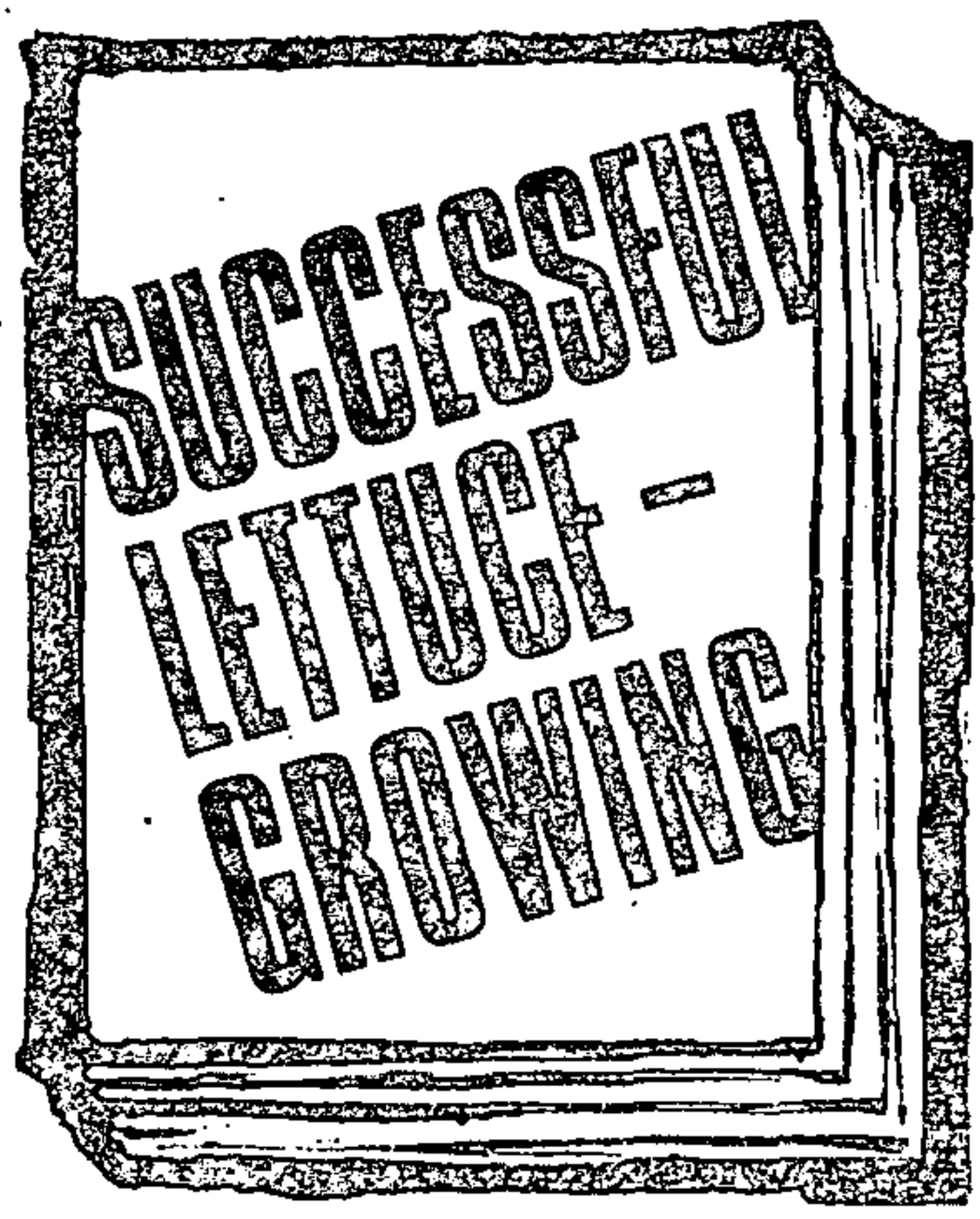
He looked at me a bit dejectedly. "Who in Kilburn wants to buy twenty-four-guinea encyclopædias? Who in Kilburn wants to buy *any* sort of encyclopædia?"

"You'll talk them into it."

He shrugged. "There must be an easier way to earn a crust," he said as he went off.

© William Scott 1966

Edward Hyams



It was not a book to dress windows. But it sold — and sold

A COUSIN of mine works for a firm of French publishers, one of the most prosperous in France, with an enormous business all created within the last twenty years. Their success is said to be due to the managing director's flair for discovering those authors who can write very long, colourful novels which win literary prizes and that fifty or a hundred thousand people buy and which even the reviewers do not condemn. The firm also publishes a great many useful textbooks and works of academic distinction that students have to buy and libraries keep on their shelves. And then, they have a very able public relations man—with connections in the right quarters and so much push that two of the firm's fiction authors are sure of election to the Academy sooner or later.

Well, the point is that all this—the thriving commerce in books, the towering literary reputations, the prosperous authors, the well-paid staff, the managing director's beautiful car and the even more beautiful "friend" in the *corps de ballet* of a well-known theatre—all this is based upon a fifty-page book with ten line-drawings, in paper covers, called *Successful Lettuce-Growing*, by Hippolyte Legrange.

It seems that twenty years ago this publishing firm was in a very small way of business. They shared an office with a theosophical healer who healed by correspondence, and they had only published two books and owed money to their printer. It didn't seem likely that they would stay in business for long, but they had not quite reached the point of making up their minds to go into liquidation; they still felt that something

might turn up. And so it did—this market gardener named Legrange, who had written a practical handbook on lettuce-growing. At the time they had no other manuscripts in hand and if they were going to stay in business they must publish a book from time to time, and this one was nicely written and packed with information: so they offered the author the equivalent of thirty pounds for it and he was very pleased to get it, and signed over his rights in the work to them.

Perhaps I should explain that, as a rule, an author retains the copyright of his work and receives royalties on its sales from the publisher; so that, as long as the book continues to sell, the author continues to receive an income from it. But a publisher can buy the copyright absolutely, in which case it becomes his sole property and the author has no more claim on it. That is what happened with *Successful Lettuce-Growing*. The transaction was insignificant and swiftly completed, and if the firm ever had the author's address, they subsequently lost it: at all events, they never saw or heard of Hippolyte Legrange again.

The book was printed in a cheap edition and distributed to booksellers and, to the publishers' astonishment, it immediately began to sell like hot cakes and had to be reprinted over and over again within the first few months; and after that with regularity twice a year, and later still once a year. It is difficult to explain such successes, although they are not uncommon: probably there did not happen to be, at that moment, any cheap, good books on lettuce cultivation and once a few gardeners—there are about six million of them in France—had read it, they found it good and recommended it to other gardeners, and soon the book was a sort of standard work on its subject. Maybe it had hidden literary merits. At all events, *Successful Lettuce-Growing* was soon enabling its publishers to launch out upon that career which was to be so successful itself in quite another field than market-gardening.

Moreover, the book continued to sell although other books dealing with the matter—books on the cultivation of culinary herbs and salads—were published: year after year it contributed something to the firm's rising income.

Now I must get back to my cousin. His firm sent him to Dralebourg, a pleasant, wealthy town in the French midlands, where an enterprising bookseller was organising a book exhibition. It was to be opened by the mayor and several well-known authors were to deliver lectures and sign copies of their

books. My cousin's firm had arranged for one of their authors to make an appearance and they sent my cousin to the town to look after this author, and to see that his works and others published by the firm, were properly displayed.

On the evening of his arrival in Dralebourg, my cousin had dinner in a restaurant and then walked back to the bookshop to see what the specially-dressed windows looked like by electric light.

When he reached the shop the street was almost deserted—it was the dinner hour—but there was one ragged, dreary-looking old man staring at the books. My cousin stopped and looked at the window too, and the old man gave him a sliding, placatory look—the sort of look with which the very poor seem to apologise for taking up a bit of the ratepayers' pavement—and he edged away a little; but he didn't take himself off, he seemed fascinated by the books.

Or perhaps it was just the comfortable glow of light which he liked.

My cousin felt quite sorry for the old creature: he looked hungry, dirty, and ill. He had a stubble of grubby beard and hollow, bloodshot eyes and the collar of his greasy, threadbare jacket was turned up, perhaps to hide the fact that he had no shirt, or simply to keep him warm.

However, my cousin had his work to do and he took out a notebook and pencil and began making notes of the changes he thought should be made in the arrangement of the books. He says that he felt foolishly ashamed of his briskness and his good clothes beside that scarecrow figure, silent and wretched, his very appearance a reproach. As a result, of course, he soon began to resent the old pauper and in another minute would have been supposing that it was drink or dishonesty which had brought the old man so low. But he had not reached that stage—his resentment of the other's misery had not quite displaced his pity, when the old man spoke to him.

He said, "Excuse me, sir, I hope you won't mind me addressing a remark to you, but would you be in the book-trade yourself?"

My cousin was a good deal surprised but he said, quite civilly, that he was, in fact, in the publishing business.

The poor old wretch said, "Ah," and shuffled a bit nearer and then he said, "You wouldn't think it to look at me, but I wrote a book myself once."

Naturally, publishers are always being pestered by aspirant

authors to publish their works, and this makes them nervous. My cousin edged away and said, as coldly as he could, "Indeed?"

And the old man said—you will have guessed what is coming—"Oh, not like Monsieur Mauriac, you know, or this Monsieur Sartre, but I did write a book and it was published. It was called *Successful Lettuce-Growing*. I got thirty pounds for it." Actually, he gave the sum in francs, of course, and he added, "It doesn't sound much now, but in those days it wasn't bad."

Of course, my cousin was very surprised indeed. He had never had anything to do with Monsieur Legrange's book, but he knew, in a general way, that it was a very steady seller, had been a best-seller, and had earned a very large amount of money for his firm. The idea that the old man had only had thirty pounds for his share shocked him—especially as he could see to what misery time had reduced the author. But he had the sense not to give his knowledge of the book away and said, "What is your name, monsieur?"

"I am called Hippolyte Legrange," the old man said with a rather pathetic little shrug, as much as to say, not that that means anything. Then my cousin knew that this was, indeed, the author of *Successful Lettuce-Growing*.

"You mean," he said, "that you sold the copyright of your book outright?"

The old man nodded. He said, "I sometimes wonder what happened to it. I daresay it's been out of print these fifteen years. I've looked in shop windows but I've never seen it." That was not surprising: the book was not one to dress a window with. The old man added, with a kind of desperate satisfaction, "Still, I did write it."

And it came to my cousin that writing that book was the only interesting thing Monsieur Legrange had done in his life and that the memory of it enabled him to hold on to his own identity which years of misery and want would have tended to destroy. My cousin now felt involved with the old man and he said, "I must go now, monsieur, but I should like to be of use to you, since you are an author. Please give me your address."

It transpired that Legrange had no address. He slept in porches, or in the market place, or under haystacks in the suburbs and sometimes in the police cell: as for his bread, he begged it. He told these things diffidently, indistinctly, ashamed but not complaining.

My cousin got out a five-hundred-franc note and gave it to the old man and said, "My dear *confrère* (there's no English for that)—my dear *confrère*, please accept this from me."

My cousin says that he expected the old man to snivel a bit and say, "God bless you sir," or something of that sort. But, in fact, the five hundred francs seemed to set him up with himself: he put it away among his rags with a dignified, "A thousand thanks, monsieur," and said that if my cousin could do anything for him, he was often to be found at such a place, mentioning a kind of doss-house.

My cousin didn't fancy going there; but he could not square it with his conscience to lose sight of the old man and do nothing, although he didn't know what he was going to do. He made an appointment to meet Legrange outside the book-shop in a week's time and, the next day, he returned to Paris.

My cousin is not a bold man, nor is he a social revolutionary. But he has the virtues of his kind: he is very scrupulous in business. It seemed to him wrong that the man who wrote *Successful Lettuce-Growing* and got only thirty pounds for it, should be in want. He made up his mind to find out just what the book had earned during its twenty-year career. Of course, the figures were francs, of varying value, but I can give an English equivalent.

My cousin found that the average price of a copy of *Successful Lettuce-Growing*, in all its editions over twenty years, was three shillings and that, altogether, six hundred and forty-two thousand copies of the book had been sold. The gross figure it had brought in for the firm was about ninety-six thousand pounds, less various discounts. My cousin knew that the royalty which the firm would have paid on a cheaply-published little book of this kind would be seven and a half per cent but, had Monsieur Legrange had a royalty contract, he would have received at that rate not thirty pounds, but over *seven thousand* pounds for his work.

Naturally, my cousin was rather shocked. He's no sentimentalist and did not for a moment blame his firm. They had simply been businesslike and, in any case, they could not have foreseen that the book would be such a money-maker. Legrange had sold the copyright of his own free will, and the publishers were entitled to the profit of their enterprise. Still, there was a very glaring difference between the figures, and poor Monsieur Legrange could certainly do with seven thousand pounds, or some part of it.

So my cousin took his story, and the figures, into the managing director's office.

The managing director was a big bland, slow-moving man, with very easy manners. He was not at all the typical French *patron*. He had a large coloured photograph of Henry Ford the First facing his desk, and another of Dr. Frank Buchman; he often talked to the staff about *service* as a business ideal and he paid them more than was usual for their work, about two per cent more, in fact. And my cousin says he, the managing director, likes all the staff to be really *keen* and, when a best-seller is in full career, to be willing to work until ten at night at least.

The managing director listened to my cousin and then he pointed out that the figure of ninety-six thousand pounds gross turnover on *Successful Lettuce-Growing* was misleading. Once you had taken cost of production and booksellers' discount and overheads into account, the firm had certainly not made a penny more than thirty thousand pounds out of the book. But he agreed that had the author had the usual seven and a half per cent royalty contract for a book of this kind, he would have received seven thousand pounds.

"And you see," my cousin said to the managing director, "he has had only thirty pounds, actually."

"That was his lookout," the managing director said, and went on to say that he was rather hurt by my cousin's manner, and that he did hope very much that my cousin was not suggesting that the firm had been too sharp?

Of course, my cousin hastened to deny such a suggestion. He explained, several times, that he had just thought that the firm might care to do something for the old fellow. "Knowing you as I do," he said to his chief, "I felt sure that you would be glad to have your attention drawn to this case."

The managing director smiled and nodded and looked for a moment at the two big coloured photographs rather as if they were icons; and he put his big hand on my cousin's shoulder and said that he was, indeed, glad that my cousin had raised the matter, and that my cousin should see that the firm could be generous on occasion and not stand on the letter of a contract. He scribbled the figure of seven thousand on his memo pad and promised to bring the business up at the next day's board meeting.

Well, the following evening the managing director's secretary brought my cousin a sealed envelope addressed to Monsieur Hippolyte Legrange, and marked *Private*, with instructions to

deliver as soon as possible. My cousin had made his appointment with Legrange to match his own last visit to the book exhibition, and he set off from Paris, when the day came, feeling very lighthearted because of his charitable mission.

Old Legrange was punctual and he looked even more wretched and pitiful than my cousin had remembered. My cousin, feeling a good deal embarrassed, for the old man was a shockingly disreputable figure, took him to a café and ordered coffee and brandy and asked Legrange to listen very carefully to what he was about to say.

The ex-gardener looked very respectful and attentive but, after he had drunk his coffee and brandy, greedily and rather noisily, his eyes kept wandering to see what people at other tables were having and he did not seem to understand what my cousin was saying.

My cousin was rather angry and inclined to be sulky, but he realised that the old man was probably hungry, so he ordered some food and let him eat and then started his explanations all over again.

My cousin says that he does not know how much of it the old man took in: he thinks that the poor fellow's vicissitudes may have damaged his powers of attention. He says that although Legrange kept his head turned towards him and his eyes fixed on him, there was a kind of vagueness and emptiness about his eyes which made my cousin feel restless and dissatisfied, as if he were talking to a dummy. This made him hurry over the story. He hastily explained the large and continuous sale of *Successful Lettuce-Growing* and then he handed the old man the sealed envelope.

Legrange seemed surprised and took it hesitantly, as if he could not connect an envelope addressed to him with the story he had just heard, or seemed to hear. He read his name on the envelope and smiled vaguely and then began to tear open the envelope, very slowly, with shaking fingers. Watching him, my cousin could still not make up his mind whether Legrange had understood what he had been told, or not.

A moment later that doubt was his consolation. For when he saw what was in the envelope he was quite panic-stricken: he realised that he had been very unbusinesslike—he ought never to have put the facts before Legrange, but ought simply to have given him the envelope with the minimum of explanation. The envelope contained ten one-thousand-franc notes—roughly ten pounds, then—and a short letter.

My cousin was so upset that he snatched the letter. It said

that while the firm was, of course, under no obligation to pay Monsieur Legrange anything in addition to the thirty pounds he had received for the copyright of his book, *Successful Lettuce-Growing*, yet, since the book had done rather better than the firm had anticipated, they were happy to be able to offer Monsieur Legrange, in view of his difficult circumstances, without prejudice and *de gratia*, the sum of ten thousand francs hereto adjoined.

My cousin had felt himself turn white at first, and then flush very uncomfortably. He could hardly bring himself to look at Legrange until he realised that the old man's attention was, at last, fully engaged; and even then, feeling that he must say *something*, but with no idea *what*, he had difficulty in looking at his companion.

The old man had laid the ten clean, new banknotes fanwise on the table before him and he sat perfectly still looking at them. And he was crying. He was not crying noisily or ostentatiously, as a younger person might have done; his tears were slow and few—all that his seventy-five years had left him. But they were not less moving on that account, and my cousin says he cannot describe how dreadful he felt and how very painful it all was to him. He was convinced, of course, that the old man's tears were those of his bitter disappointment; he did not know what to say or do; he felt as if he had been guilty of perpetrating a wickedly cruel hoax.

Presently the old man looked up, his eyes misted by tears, and said, brokenly, "So much money! I have not seen such a sum in ten years! How kind, how very kind, people are. Ah, sir, you must forgive an old man's tears: it is so very long since I met with such goodness, such heart."

© Edward Hyams 1966

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (MARCH ISSUE)

Across. 1, *England.* 5, *Tumbler.* 9, *Toupees.* 10, *Cringed.* 11, *Thesaurus.* 12, *Brave.* 13, *Sweet.* 15, *Red-handed.* 17, *Manhattan.* 19, *Exact.* 22, *Shrug.* 23, *Beefeater.* 25, *Leakage.* 26, *Sunrise.* 27, *Spender.* 28, *Trident.*

Down. 1, *Estates.* 2, *Gruyère.* 3, *Arena.* 4, *Desert rat.* 5, *Ticks.* 6, *Main brace.* 7, *Laggard.* 8, *Redhead.* 14, *Tear gland.* 16, *Dinner set.* 17, *Muscles.* 18, *Narrate.* 20, *Astride.* 21, *Torrent.* 23, *Blear.* 24, *Ennui.*

NO MORE

BY WILLARD MARSH

'What's wrong with you — sticking your neck out? You don't know the first thing about me'

HOLDING fast to the handrail, Avis hitched herself up the narrow bank of stairs. She paused at the landing to unlatch the door to the roof. As it swung full, someone moved in the shadows. Avis drew back, catching her breath. The figure lowered his gun with a laugh.

"Sorry!" he sang out. "Thought you were a pheasant."

She stared at him sullenly. He was squatting with his back to the ledge, the revolver cradled loosely in his lap. A ragged circle of cigarette butts surrounded him. Through the settling dusk his features assumed those of the new tenant.

"That wasn't very bright," Avis said. "People have been killed by unloaded guns."

His teeth shone in a grin. "A stupid gag," he agreed. "Pull up a seat and be sociable."

She stepped out on the roof hesitantly.

"Mind closing the door?"

Surprised, Avis turned and pushed the door shut.

"That's better," he said. "I can't stand the draught."

Avis came forward, dragging her withered right foot behind her with a quick crab-like gait. She was conscious of his eyes following her across the tarred gravel to the weathered camp stool. Seating herself, she waited for him to comment awkwardly on the weather, get to his sound normal feet in

embarrassment and leave her to the arriving night. But instead he smiled apologetically.

"Got a chance to get some shooting in this weekend," he said. "Thought I'd come up for some air and clean my gun."

"I didn't think they shot pheasants with a pistol," Avis said.

"I guess it's against the rules here. But I'm an outsider."

The streetlamps blinked on below. Through their diffused haloes she watched the top-floor tenant she had glimpsed late in the evenings, ducking past her basement window with a bag of sandwiches from the coffee shop. He was a slim, high-strung man in his early twenties, with black hair strong against his sallow features. In his mustard-coloured sports shirt and dark flannels, he might have been any student her own age. But she doubted it, he was too mature and wary.

"Can't ever get my fill of pheasants," he said. "I'm a sportsman from away back."

Avis smiled in spite of herself. He was being patronising, but at least he wasn't being sympathetic.

"You could have fooled me," she said.

"Shows you how tricky looks can be. I'm strictly an outdoor character," he said. "Up with the chickens, after a night of clean living. Then into the woods with my faithful pointer for a brace of quail, and back in time to pose for the whisky ads." There was a contagious nervous gaiety in his voice. "How about you? How do you keep up your morale in these hectic times?"

"Me? Oh, I endorse beauty soaps. My picture's in all the magazines. I guess you didn't recognise me without my lather on."

He grinned at her across the yellow half light. "Been living in this dump long?"

"Why, this is a very elegant address! Even the mice have pedigrees."

"Are those just mice in the walls? They sound more like cocker spaniels."

Smiling, Avis got to her feet and stretched. She limped over to the ledge and leaned out.

"It's really not so bad," she said wistfully. "Not when you get used to it."

Three storeys below, the rubbly sidewalk lay smoothed by lamplight. A smell of simmering cabbage drifted up. Distantly, the block echoed with the soprano profanity of kids in flapping pursuit of a tin can. Avis soothed her eyes on the park across the street.

It was nothing more than a patch of parched grass, with a few listless shrubs competing among the flaking iron benches; but it was a green oasis in the shingled grey monotone. An expensive, older-looking car was parked beside it. One of those conservative jobs, maybe belonging to some old resident who'd made his mark in the world and come back to reminisce. Maybe paying a call in the neighbourhood, because she'd noticed it there most of the day.

Just then a match flared inside it. The chauffeur, probably.

"We even have a park," Avis said. "Of course it's not much of a—"

"I know. I've seen it."

Something in his voice drew her head around. He'd lit another cigarette and was studying her through the rising smoke. She stood facing him with her tar-coloured hair loosely piled around her shoulders. Her unmade lips parted a little, as if breathing had become more difficult.

"You're a pretty girl," he said bluntly. "I never thought of it that way, but you are. How long have you had that leg?"

She didn't say anything.

"That leg of yours," he repeated. "Has it always been that way?"

"Yes," she said. "All my life."

"I guess it bothers you a lot."

"I guess it does," she said.

He shifted awkwardly. "Look, everybody's got one. One way or another. Nobody gets off free."

Limping back to the stool, Avis sat heavily. "What are you running from?" she whispered.

"I stopped running, lady. I'm already there, as far as I can go." He glanced at the neighbouring roof, a space of no more than twenty-five feet. "I guess I'm not about to tie any world record for the long jump."

"It's that car across the street, isn't it?"

He continued watching the next roof. "Been running all the way from East St. Louis. You'd think with a head-start like that, I almost could." He turned back to her. "What's your name, lady?"

"Avis," she said. "What's yours?"

"Mine? Clay," he said. "Like in pigeon."

She made herself breathe evenly. "Are you a gangster?"

He laughed, then considered it. "I don't think so. I'm just a bad businessman, up for retirement."

"Please—isn't there something I can do?"

"I don't know," he smiled, "is there?"

"The police?" she faltered.

"That's a thought. Give them a ring. And if no-one answers, try the Boy Scouts."

She turned her head away.

"I'm not putting you down. Really," he said gently. "It's just that I guessed wrong, and now I have to pay off."

"But there must be *some* way. I can't just let you stay here and get—"

"Don't be crazy. You better run on home, if you got one." He stared at her in baffled anger. "What the hell's wrong with you, wanting to put your neck out? You don't know the first thing about me. I could be any kind of public enemy."

"What if you are? I don't owe the public anything."

He waited, expressionless.

"I don't *care*," she said desperately. "I'm not going anywhere. What kind of a life is this—cooped up in a room not much wider than a grave? How would you like it?"

"How would I like it?" he half smiled. "I wouldn't, lady. I *didn't*."

Avis lowered her eyes. "Even so—" she picked at the fraying canvas of the stool "—even so, it's not the same thing. Your bars were real. You knew where you were, and you knew it wouldn't last. And besides, you're a man," she said. "You asked me how I keep up my morale. I keep it up over a sewing-machine, hemming things for other women to go dancing in."

She could feel his eyes on her, dark and equivocal.

"And even before that, it was never real. My father was an evangelical minister. Along with this "—she nodded at her foot "—he gave me a nice set of rules to explain it. He said it was a gift from God, who'd seen fit to test my worthiness. Well, I'm not a candidate any more. Let Him recruit saints somewhere else. I'll settle for a life, the smallest little life with people in it."

The man nodded gravely. "All right, lady. I got a small life left, let's pretend you're included. What do we do with it?"

"Well, you certainly can't stay here . . ."

He shrugged.

Avis kept her eyes down, getting it out in one breath. "I have a room in the basement. There's an entrance around through the back. They wouldn't look for you there."

"Tell me about it," he said. "Your room and all. What's it like?"

She looked up, trying to read his face. "Why?"

"I just want to picture you. Moving around in it, the things you do."

"It's not much. Just one room and a kitchenette. The walls are always damp. But it's got a stove. You wouldn't have to sneak out at night for hamburgers."

"Cheeseburgers. You been keeping track of me."

"Yes," she said.

"Where would I sleep? That's an important point, you know."

Avis could feel the colour rising to her face. "There's a wall bed that lets down," she said stiffly.

"Pretty wide bed?"

She met his level gaze. "Do we have to talk about it?" she said, feeling her control going. "Can't we just let things take care of themselves?"

"Sure," he said, "sure we can. Let's give it a whirl." He reached forward, resting his hand on her wrist. "Look, what's your name again? Avis? Sit over here a minute," He handed her over to the ledge beside him.

Together with him in the shadows, she could feel her shoulders trembling.

"Listen, Avis," he said, "I'm not sure how to put it. Guess I haven't moved in the right circles. But what I'm getting at is—you never been with a man, have you?"

"No," she said.

"Well, I'm no lover-boy myself. I mean, I was never in circulation places where I could even get the right time from—well, say a girl like you. So here's the way it works, Avis," he said quickly. "We'll stay in that room of yours till things get well. You'll open a tin of spaghetti and I'll dry the dishes, and at night we'll sleep in the wall bed that lets down, and the damp walls won't matter. We'll stick, we'll make out. But not tonight."

He ran his palm along her arm clumsily. "I can't make it tonight," he said, "because the folks across the street brought a friend. And the back door downstairs opens just like the one up here. Whoever comes through it is a pigeon."

Avis sat like a board, trying not to give. Then she slumped against him with what seemed like exhausted laughter that gradually became a harsher sound, like tearing cloth. She

felt his arm loosely around her, making futile soothing motions.

"You can't go up against the law of averages, Avis," he said. "This just wasn't our night."

He stroked her into a sort of calmness. The stars continued hanging over them like pale, niched torches. His voice probed the opaque night uncertainly. "Running's nothing new for me. I always used to have the bottom bunk in reform school. Always found myself on the floor, running in my sleep. Used to wonder what I'd find when I got there, when I finally reached the wall."

He bent over her. "And what is it but a girl," he said. "A nice little package named Avis, who invites me to share her board and pillow."

Avis smiled. "And then what happens?"

"Gentleman that I am, I accept."

"Is she better than the others?"

"The best. We have the world by the tail, me and the minister's daughter."

"Tell me."

"Well, let's see. We're pretty domestic people. Stick close to home. Not too much action, mostly. But we like it."

"Don't we ever get bored?"

"Impossible. The street's a free show. Dog-fights, landladies swapping dirt. And we got a box seat, right in the window where we'll have those big red flowers."

"Roses?"

"No. Cán't remember, it's been so long. Name another."

"Geraniums?"

"Sure, that's them." He smiled. "Big fat ones we'll have, the size of a plate. They'll do fine in this hot weather. And nights like this, we sleep in the raw."

"It sounds very . . . happy."

"It is. We live happily ever after."

"Just like the whisky ads," Avis said.

"That's the idea." He brushed her lightly on the cheek. "And now I'm tired of waiting for company. I think I'll go visiting instead."

Avis sat upright, the mood suddenly shattered. She tightened her arms around him and clung.

He let her keep that way for a moment, then gently prised her free. When he climbed to his feet the revolver was in his hand again.

"Here goes. There shouldn't be more than one out at the

back," he said. "That's pretty even odds. I'll drop you a letter."

"Will you, *will* you?"

"If I can," he smiled. "If not, I'll be seeing you." As if to himself, he added softly, "In hell, maybe."

"Don't say that . . ."

"Oh, I don't know," he smiled. "They tell me it's almost comfortable there in the evenings." Halfway to the door he turned to wink. "We can always sleep raw."

He slipped through the door and was gone . . .

Avis knelt in the gathering silence, not daring to breathe, to disturb a molecule of air. *And I don't even have his name to keep,* she thought. Slowly she raised her face, staring intently at a far, cold star.

Listen to me, she thought fiercely. *I don't need any help. No more of your gifts with dirty little strings attached. Keep off, that's all. Give us a chance for once, please, can't you . . .*

And now she could no longer see the star. Still on her knees, holding nothing at all between her clasped palms, Avis waited for the sound of luck, the wide night cracking open to let feet run safely through.

© Willard March 1956

" Look, Martha, would you have the decency not to talk about your day while somebody is being shot?"

Alwyn -ON HOBBIES

I DIDN'T decide I was crazy until 1952. That's when I began making a steady salary and could afford to be crazy. Everybody in my new social set was on the couch. It was a status symbol.

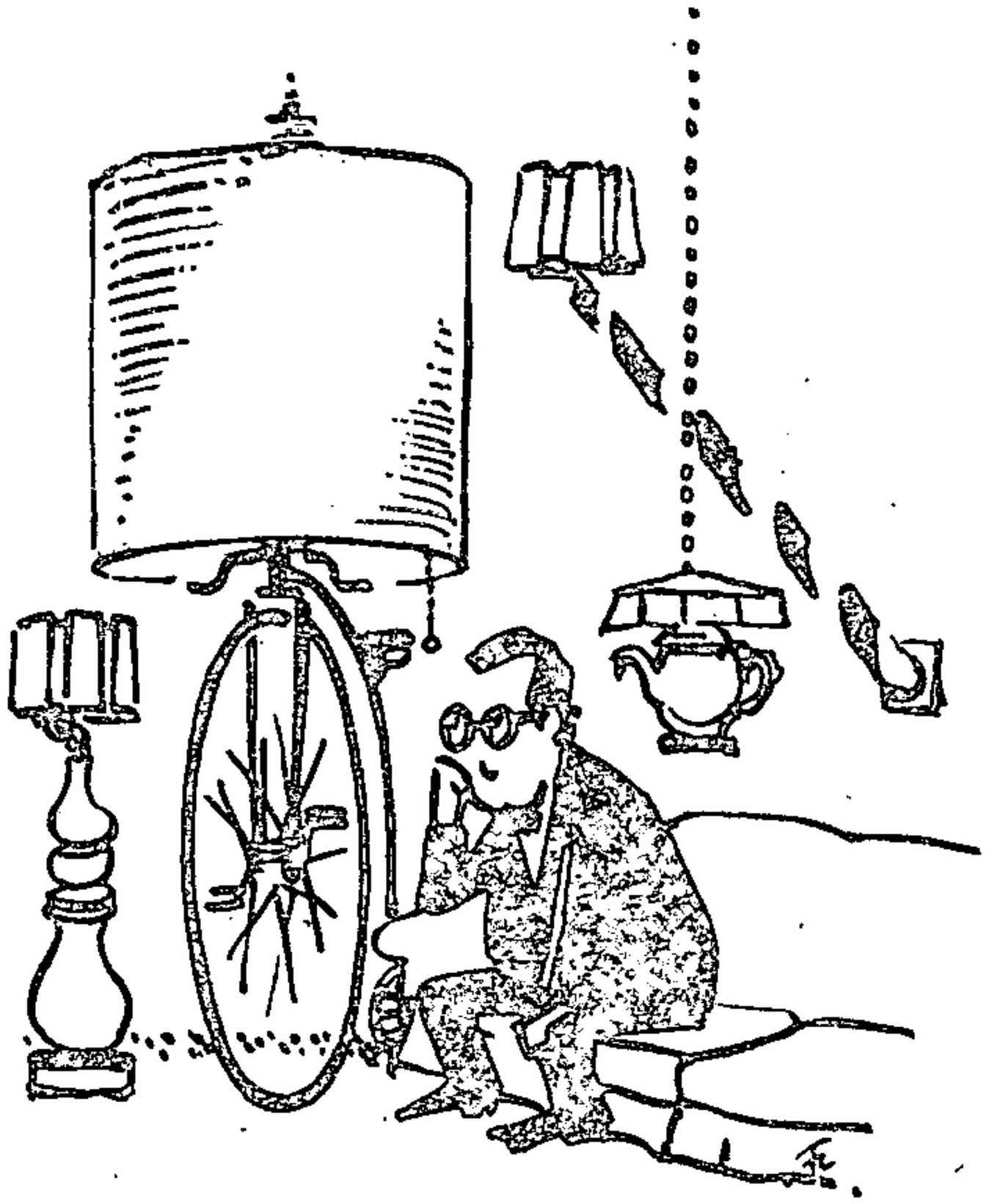
My hunger for psychoanalysis coincided with my jump into the commercial grey flannel snake-pit. Something in me wanted to adjust and conform and make a steady living and be part of an organisation; and something else in me, something much stronger, something I have since learned to follow without question—this other something wanted me to be somewhere else, to be going back and forth on the ferry all night, to be writing crazy Christmas memos, to do not what They wanted me to do but what I wanted to do. So I worked out those frustrations by—to use a word I learned in analysis—"sublimating." Sublimating means doing what you don't want to do, because you don't want to do what you do want to do.

I took up hobbies. Hobbies were my hobby.

My first hobby was building model electric trains. I had never done anything with my hands before, and I got real pleasure from building the tiny cars and locomotives and laying out the track and the scenery and making the whole thing work. My son, Robbie, was not much more than a baby then, but he helped and he did all the electrical wiring—he was born with a complete knowledge of electricity and electronics, don't ask me how. And bit by bit I bought every piece of equipment known to model railroading.

When I was quite sure I had bought all the equipment and all the magazines and all the books and built all the kits, I dropped model railroading like a hot potato. This is known in psychoanalysis as "compulsiveness."

Who better to cast a sardonic eye on the merry-go-round of life than that American funny man ALLAN SHERMAN



I next compelled myself into photography. I started with a $3 Kodak Brownie. I began to haunt the camera shops and discount houses of New York, and I did what they call "trading up." Trading up means that you bring in your $3 camera and trade it for a $29 camera and they give you a $2 credit, so you only pay $27. It is of no importance that they would sell you the $29 camera for $27 without a trade. The important thing is to keep an endless chain of trades going.

Each hobby has its own vocabulary. Robbie and I would have long discussions about "depth of field" and "depth of focus" (Robbie understands these) and "parallax." Parallax is what has happened when Uncle Charlie shows you his home movies and Aunt Minnie's head is cut off at the top of the picture.

From still photography I plunged myself into motion-picture photography. I made an art film, the stars of which were my own left eye, the Queensboro Bridge, some hot dogs turning on a grill at Nedick's, a train wreck on the Long Island Railroad and a large plate of spaghetti and meatballs. I was the Ingmar Bergman of Jackson Heights, but the world was not yet ready for this art film. I showed it to everyone who came over.

Then one night a friend of mine invited us to a party at

which he showed us four hours of *his* home movies. Sometime during the second hour I received the message, and that night I said farewell to photography.

My next madness was antiques.

We were furnishing our first home at the time. I had business managers who were husband and wife, Phil and Pauline. Their entire home was furnished with antiques. Nothing made Pauline quite so proud as to take you through her home and display her antiques.

She would walk you into the dining room and show you her magnificent ten-foot pine harvest table. You would have to say, "What a magnificent harvest table!"

Then she would say, "I picked it up for a dollar thirty-five."

"No!"

"Yes," she would say. "Don't you love the way it's *distressed*? And look at that *patina*!"

My wife, Dee, and I dashed around Westchester County and upstate New York and downstate Connecticut and Cape Cod, gobbling up antiques.

A lot of things have become antiques because there is no longer any use for them. Pauline helped us find a use for them. She would take those useless things and make them into either lamps or plant-holders.

Dee and Pauline and I would walk into an antique shop, and on a musty shelf we would see what appeared to be a vase.

"My!" Pauline would exclaim. "What an unusual slop-jar." I don't know the full history of this item, but I presume it was used by the Colonials for the preservation of slop. Now and then we would find one with some nineteenth-century slop still inside it.

"Grab it up!" Pauline would yell. "Quick! Before someone else gets it! It will make a beautiful lamp base!"

There isn't a single lamp in our house that looks like a lamp. One is an old grocery scale. Another is one leg of an old kitchen sink, turned upside down. One is fashioned from four volumes of the collected works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, with a hole drilled through them for the wires. One is a barber's pole. One is a French brass coffee-pot. One is an English postbox.

When all of these strange devices are turned on, they shed a lovely light on the crank telephone, the tool bench, the butter churn, the umbrella stand and the bedpan.

Those are our antiques.

As I got affluenter and affluenter and fatter and fatter, I decided to take up some physical open-air sport. But I didn't want to get *too* physical, so I chose golf.

The words I learned were "divot" and "pronate" and "supinate" and "clubhead" and "overlapping" and "interlocking" and "bunker."

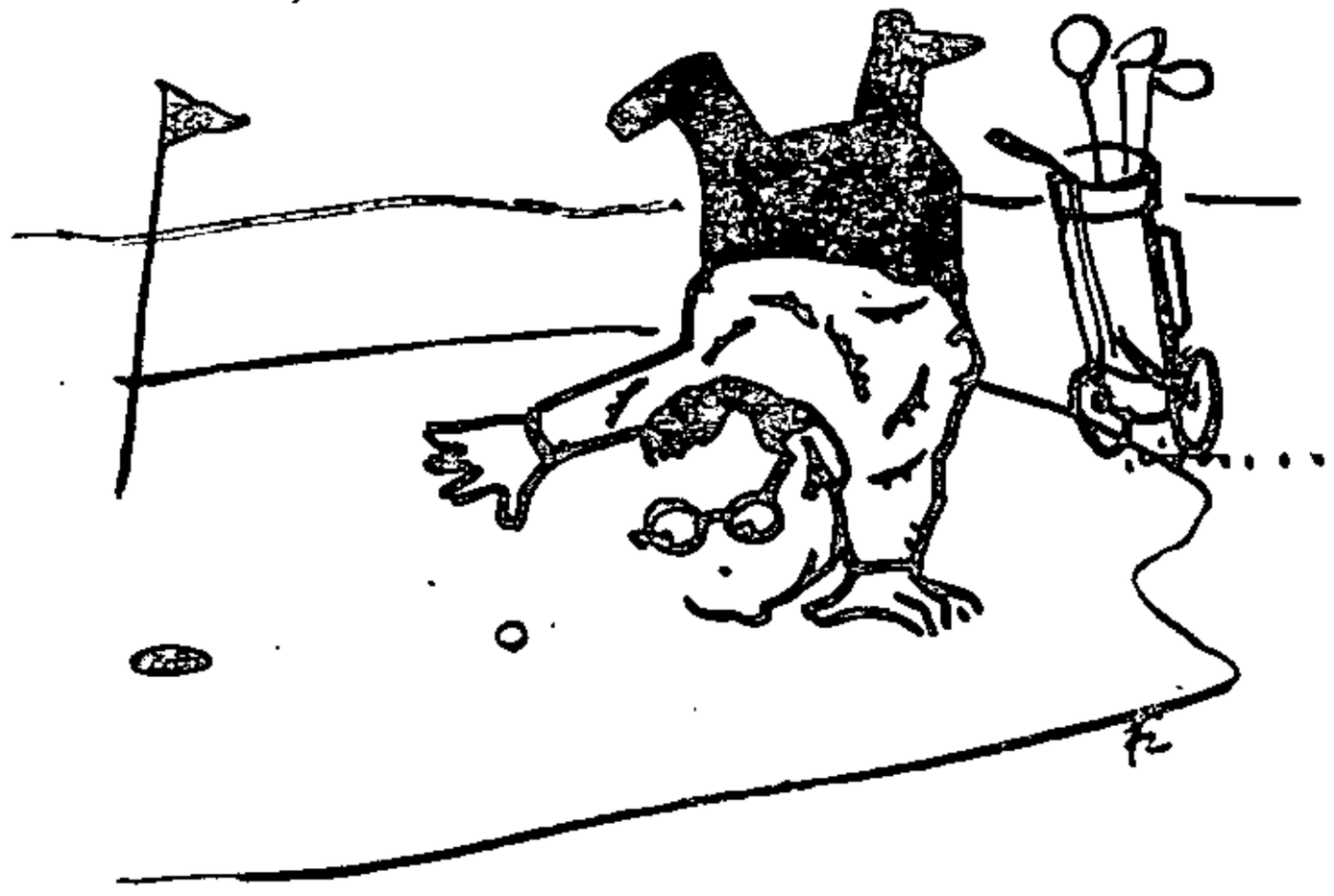
I bought a set of clubs and a lot of balls and tees and every book available, and I played golf every day. I would play nine holes at seven o'clock in the morning and then go into the office, where I would practise on the carpet with a putter.

I bought golf shirts with little alligators on them. Those shirts are guaranteed to take four strokes off your game. I bought eyeglasses that made the holes seem larger, hand-warmers for playing in sub-zero weather, pocket flasks for drinking Scotch while playing in sub-zero weather. I joined the Vernon Hills Country Club in Tuckahoe, New York. The golf pro told me I would swing better if I didn't have so much stomach out in front of me. In four months I lost fifty-five pounds. I broke 100. Then I broke 90. When I broke 80 in 1960, it was the supreme achievement of my career as a sportsman and I had this yearning to see my wife and children again.

So I at once lost interest in golf.

I looked around the country club and saw that all the other players were Jewish. That inspired me to write the following parody of *Seventy-six Trombones*:

Seventy-six Sol Cohens in the country club,
And a hundred and ten nice men named Levine!
And there's more than a thousand Finks
Who parade around the links—
It's a sight that really must be seen . . .



When I quit golf, I resumed writing. I said to myself, This time I'll do it in style. I furnished an office in my Rye mansion with Danish modern furniture, a dictating machine, a photo-copier, fluorescent lighting, an electric pencil-sharpener and the Executive-style IBM electric typewriter.

My first story was about my grandmother and the football. My agent at once sold it.

Well, Allan, baby, you're on the track again. You took the wrong fork back there in 1952, but you're on the right road again and now you'll write more funny pieces, like Robert Benchley or James Thurber.

But I couldn't. I developed the worst case of writer's block you ever heard of. I was miserable.

Dee said, "Why don't you take up a hobby?"

So I decided to become an art collector. There was only one painting I wanted to collect. I had seen it in the Museum of Modern Art. It was Edward Hopper's painting of a Victorian house. It was called *House by the Railroad.*

I asked my secretary to find out how much it would cost. She called the Museum of Modern Art and put me on the phone with the man there. I offered to take Hopper's painting off his hands.

"How much?" I asked.

After I convinced him that I was not kidding, he told me that the painting was not for sale and there was no price on it because it was priceless, but he *could* tell me that it was insured for $140,000.

Well, I thought, if I can't buy that Hopper painting, I will paint it myself.

So I started taking painting lessons.

I learned words like "chiaroscuro," "egg tempera" and "don't-mess-up-the-linoleum"—an art term which Dee taught me.

In five weeks I painted a very good imitation of *House by the Railroad.* It's so authentic-looking that it fools many people—especially if they're drunk and looking at it from a distance.

It is now hanging in my living room in Bel Air. I call it "Mr. Hopper's House." What else should I call it? I can't call it my house.

So, you see, my hobbies didn't help.

I was still a square peg in one of life's innumerable round holes . . .

© Allan Sherman 1965

by LEONE STEWART

The Park

ALL your life there is one person that you feel eternally grateful to. In my case it was Nicko Parsons.

Nicko lived five doors down in the terrace row of back-to-back houses in our northern town, and as we were of an age we went around together. He was a far tougher specimen than I was, fatter, too, with a cropped ginger head and a freckled face and a shapeless, broken nose, due to a street skirmish he'd had with a gang of boys.

It was the early nineteen-thirties, the dark days of the Depression, and my father had been out of work for as long as I could remember. We lived on something called the Means Test and fought, as all fought in our street, to keep our respectability. My mother did a bit of needlework for neighbours, though they could afford to pay so little it hardly seemed worth the effort. Half the night she would stay up turning the handle of her old sewing-machine, making a child's confirmation dress, and then charge no more than a few pence. I had two brothers and two sisters and none of us kicked against our overcrowded living conditions or the scarcity of food. We were a product of the times and the times were hard. The outside world, away from our street and our town,

might be a star's distance away for all we knew of it. Yet friendships were strong, loyalties firm, and where we could we helped each other.

Nicko would come into our back yard, where the coal heap stood by the lavatory door, and we'd share whatever we had to eat. We were great friends and daily insulted one another in our well-coated, northern accents. When neighbours bawled us out for making so much noise, we would drift off to the park.

Over and over again we were told how lucky we were to have the park—a bit of green in the midst of the smoke and the dark, ugly houses and the flea-pit of a cinema that was called the Palace. The park had high, spiked railings and a squeaking in-and-out iron swing gate, so that no bicycles, prams or horses could be taken through. There were two rusty swings and a high chute to slide down, though few children ever went on this for fear of wearing out the seats in trousers or knickers even more. There were no flowers, only a cabbage patch that old Coggin, the park-keeper, tended and kept for his own use. There was an improvised football-pitch without goal posts and a few tired trees that happily spilled conkers for us in the autumn. The park, as we had so often been told at school, was a great concession and daily we must count ourselves fortunate to have it.

Once, a mill-owner's house had stood there, and after Silas Evans' home had been burnt down, he decided to bequeath the half-acre of land to the local council. He stipulated that it was for the children, and must be used as a recreation-ground.

Coggin, the keeper, did not like children. If he'd had his way they'd never have been allowed through the gates and so at every opportunity he did his best to persuade us away—the swings were always chained up on Sundays; and at four o'clock on weekdays, the time we would be coming out of school, Coggin would get out his padlock. So it was in the street that we played mostly and Nicko would only drag me along to the park when he felt in a particularly aggressive mood and wanted to bait the old keeper. Even to our young minds we could never see the sense of a recreation-ground since we were so unwelcome there, and never knew when Coggin would suddenly take it into his head to chase us with a stick.

One day when Nicko came into our back yard and stood leaning against the wall, he was chewing a carrot that had

fallen off the back of a green-grocery cart. I waited for him to offer me half; when he didn't, I consoled myself with the thought that it was probably unwashed anyway.

Just then I had troubles of my own. Our mother had announced a few days ago round the tea-table that she was going to have another baby. I didn't mind about the baby, only her face had been so sad and my father had not come over to the table, but sat by the range, biting at his nails and leaving what bread there was for the family.

I was thinking also of what Mr. Barnes, my teacher at school, had said that very afternoon. He had taken me aside when the others had gone home and asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up.

It was a stupid question, for would I have any choice in the matter? To get a job at all would be a miracle, but to please him and because he was smiling as if he liked me, I said importantly that I would like to be a teacher like himself.

"You will be sitting for the scholarship next year," he said, rubbing at his wispy moustache. "And I have a feeling you're going to pass. You know what that means, don't you?"

Of course I knew. It meant I would have the chance to go to the grammar school on the perimeter of the town, a recently-built building of red bricks with a decent playing field at the back. But you could only go to the Grammar if your father could afford to buy you a uniform and signed a paper to say he was willing for you to stay until you were sixteen.

How could my father, out of work all these years, and now with another baby on the way, promise any such thing? The future was too uncertain, and even his stoic optimism would dwindle and burn out soon if faith were not restored by a job.

Only that afternoon I didn't tell the beaming teacher what was passing through my mind. We all had to play a part, what else was there for us? So I said that I hoped I'd get a scholarship and I was sure then that my father would send me to the Grammar . . .

Coming to the end of the carrot, Nicko drew from his pocket a sheaf of lined pages, torn, I suspected, from his copy book at school.

"What's this, then?" I asked.

He handed me a stub of pencil. "Sign your name right there at the bottom, man."

"Not before I know what it is," I murmured, caution my second name.

"It's a petition. I got it up. So far I've collected three

pages of names—all the nippers at our school and them that go to the Catholic. The only one who refused to sign was your daft sister, Lil."

I looked down at the pages and the names. Eddie Smith, Micky Carter, Alice Allan, Norman Tinker . . . they went on and on and I guessed that Nicko had been busy.

Then I read the heading. This had been written in ink and I recognised Nicko's spidery handwriting and the inevitable blots that he could never avoid:

WE THE CHILDREN OF THIS TOWN NO LONGER WANT THE PARK. WE WOULD RATHER IT WAS A FACTORY.

I looked at the lolling Nicko, who was picking at the blistered paint on our lavatory door.

"Well, come on, man, what's it all about?" I demanded.

"You don't know nothing, do you?" he said with contempt and then gave me a kick for my lack of local knowledge.

Then painstakingly, as if I were a three-year-old, he said: "There's this man what wants to build a factory on where the park is now. He comes from London and he's got brass in plenty. Any road, he reckons if the council will let him have that land, he'll be able to employ three or four hundred men. Jobs!"

Nicko glared into my face. "*Jobs* for fathers and brothers and us when we're older. Now do you see, you half-wit?" He poked me in the chest with his finger.

I suppose I had heard fleetingly about the proposed factory. But then our fathers were often talking of ships that were to be built and new railway lines to be laid. It was just talk, something that seldom came to anything, yet kept them buoyant for the time being, floating on a sea of hope. Life had a purpose only if there was a job to be had, even one on a distant horizon gave the present a meaning. You only had to wait six months, a year, then you'd be fully employed. You could call yourself a man again.

So conversation in kitchen and street leaned usually towards the subject of a job; and we children, perhaps more *blasé* than our elders, took it all with a pinch of salt. It was their kind of game and they were as much entitled to it as we were to our marbles and well-worn footballs.

"How will this here petition of yours make any difference?" I asked Nicko.

"We'll see if it does or not. Who wants that ruddy old park? Only them on the council that have soft heads and full bellies; they can't see beyond their daft thumbs."

"But everyone knows the town wants work," I murmured, now a little in awe of Nicko since he seemed to be so sure of himself and his petition.

"Yes, the town wants work, but it's the park, see, takes us off the streets, they say, only you know and I know that it don't."

I signed my name to the petition and then I inquired what Nicko intended to do with it.

He winked at me. "You'll see. There's a public meeting at the Town Hall tomorrow night, and you and me and a lot more of the kids are going to be there. They'd better. I've told them to turn up, else I'll belt 'em round the ear."

Nicko had some good persuasive methods.

In the house my father was at the scullery sink, doing the washing. There was just the one tap that dripped cold water, but he carried the steaming black kettle to and fro from the range. He was a tall, thin man and though I knew he was quite old, easily forty, he still wore a look of youth. Maybe it was the gleam of hope that never died out of his eyes, or the belief that one day things would be better.

My sister, Lil, was putting the rinsed clothes through the mangle and I wondered why she had refused to sign the petition.

"If they build a factory on the park, Dad, will you get a job there?" I asked.

"Maybe." He was a man of few words but many thoughts, I was sure.

I hindered him, standing there by the sink, and a feeling of pity went through me. He shouldn't have to do the washing. He was a clever man—why, he could answer any question I liked to put to him. He should have a job, a good job that gave him a wage and respect.

"If I pass the scholarship will I be able to go to the Grammar?" I said.

He gave me a sideways glance. "Who's been talking to you, then?"

"Mr. Barnes from the school; he thinks I will pass."

"And what will you do with yourself after with your fine grammar-school education, then?"

"Be a teacher," I said.

He smiled—not a happy smile, but something bleak and far away. "They do fill you up with tales, don't they, at that school?"

"But if you had a job," I insisted, "then I could go, couldn't I?"

"And if pigs could swim," Lil murmured from the background. "And how's our dad going to get a regular job, just you tell me that, Mr. Young-know-all?"

I rounded on her. "If the factory comes, then Dad will have a job."

"It won't come," she said. "The council will never sell that land. I told Nicko Parsons when he showed me his daft petition."

I wanted to hit her, but Dad was there and so I didn't chance it. She was a year older than me and always too ready to accept the poverty we had as if it were an act of God and nothing in the wide world could be done about it.

It was seven o'clock the next evening when Nicko kicked the back-yard gate open and came calling for me. The sight of him made me wonder what he was playing at. He wore a long overcoat that trailed the ground and I knew it was a cover for something, though what, I had no idea.

The crowd of supporters that Nicko had ordered to be outside the Town Hall were there in a straggling queue, and Alice Allan, a thin, pimply girl who had a fancy for Nicko but whose advances were rudely ignored, came out of the line towards us.

"It's no good, Nicko," she said, "the man on the door won't let us in; he said no kids allowed. It's a meeting between the councillors and the townspeople."

"It's our park what they're going to talk about," Nicko said, and he made as if to walk up the steps, but she caught his arm.

"No, don't, the man said he'd send for a policeman if we tried again. Any road, they've all gone in now and the meeting's started."

Nicko screwed up his face, so that he looked all freckles and no eyes.

Then he gave me a thump in the back. "Come on, man, follow me." To the raised eyebrows of Alice Allan he said: "You stop here and keep the other kids in order. No mucking around, mind."

He seemed to know the geography of the Town Hall and he led me down an alleyway and pointed to a small window. "Give me a leg up," he ordered.

I didn't argue, and all the while, as I bent down and allowed Nicko to stand on my shoulders, I was fearful that someone would come along and catch us red-handed.

Nicko was some weight and I started to sweat. Then beside my ear I saw one of his boots; it had no sole to it, and the laces were missing. I knew that Nicko had better boots and wondered why he had chosen to wear these and show himself up so.

He managed to get through the window and then he leaned out and by a full stretch I was able to catch at his hands and then he hauled me up, too. I had never broken in anywhere before, so the thrill of it, mixed with dire anticipation in case we were caught, made my heart thump. As I went through the open window I saw that Nicko was standing in a wash basin and there was a nasty crack down the middle and I wondered if he was responsible.

We got the window shut and then, bent double, we ran to the door.

There was a long passage with hanging fire buckets and doors with the word PRIVATE on them.

Nicko, still in full command, went forward and I was too scared to do anything else but follow him.

As we turned a sharp corner I nearly died there on the spot. A large figure in an imposing uniform, all war ribbons like the commissionaire at the Palace cinema, was blocking a doorway.

Undaunted, Nicko went straight up to him. "Let me in, please. It's a matter of life and death. My uncle must come at once. Our house is on fire!" It must have been those hanging red fire buckets that gave Nicko such inspiration.

The man was too taken aback to stop us now and we sailed through the swing doors and into the hall.

The audience, I could tell at a glance, were not people from our street. Cloth caps and shabby clothes were not evident. Instead, the *élite* from the hill-top houses were congregated—the women with tippets of fur and the men in dark suits, with collars and ties.

There was an empty row of chairs at the back and Nicko pulled me to a seat. The platform at the far end was brightly lit and a line of people sat there, all important and prosperous-looking.

"That's Lady Caroline from the Manor House," Nicko whispered in my ear. "She's on the Council."

There she stood, a sweet-faced lady in a satiny blue cloak with a lovely hat on her head that boasted feathers and veiling. She was speaking into a microphone so that her voice boomed out around us.

"Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you in the name of common humanity to consider the children; children, who, through no fault of their own, have little joy in life. We cannot, I repeat *cannot*, sanction this factory when it means that the park, the children's park, will go for ever. If such a calamity should occur they will have nothing, nowhere to play except the awful streets."

I heard a murmur of voices and then a burst of clapping broke out. Heads nodded in agreement with all Lady Caroline had said.

Then a bulbous man with a big black moustache got heavily to his feet.

"That's him," Nicko gave me a poke, "that's old moneybags, Mr. Chantry, what wants to build the factory."

I was much impressed by my friend's amazing knowledge of all these facts. He made me feel I was an outsider in the town, never able to recognise local and important people.

Chantry removed his cigar, cleared his throat and then pushed his head forward. "I've heard all the talk, all the arguments; and believe me, ladies and gentlemen, it leaves me stone cold. If I can't have the park for the factory site then I'll take myself off somewhere different. I'll build nowhere else in this town. The legal advisers have pointed out to you that while the good man, Silas Evans, bequeathed the land to be used as a recreation-ground for the children, he did not see fit to endow it, and in good faith trusted that you councillors would continue to find the revenue for its upkeep. This you have nobly done these past ten years and by so doing and under the terms of the said will and bequest that land now belongs to the ratepayers."

He paused, staring around as if he wondered if anyone would dare contradict him. No-one did. "You have one week to consider selling me the land and this is my final word on the subject!"

He sat down and lit a fresh cigar to show he could afford to be wasteful.

Three other men rose to speak in turn, all supporting Lady Caroline and pleading in heavy words and with fervent emotion for the poor ragged children.

Listening to them, I was half swayed myself, thinking that perhaps, after all, the park was our right, even if we didn't enjoy playing there because of the ill-tempered, free-with-his-clouts, Coggin.

The chairman then stood up and said they would take a vote

on the matter. It was pretty obvious, even to me, which way the voting would go. We would keep our park and there would be no new factory for our fathers to work in.

It was at that moment that Nicko threw off his trailing overcoat and lumbered down the aisle in his outworn boots. He was a sight, all right; knee-length patched trousers and a moth-eaten shrunken jersey with the elbows out. For the life of me I didn't know how he could do it. Parading himself as a scarecrow in front of all these dignitaries!

In consternation the platform sitters watched Nicko clamber up the steps and place the sheets of lined paper down on the table.

"May it please your Lords and Ladies," he said, "this is a petition from all us children."

Lady Caroline put a hand up to her face and a murmur broke out in the hall.

Nicko, valiant still, moved to the microphone and spoke into it.

Such courage I did not think I should ever witness again; it was a sight to stay in the memory for ever—the ragged boy delivering a speech he must have worked out beforehand and now presented without a quiver in his voice or a word forgotten. His plea was for the factory, his insistence that the park meant nothing while fathers and brothers were out of work.

It was like poetry ringing in my ears and a deep respect welled up inside me. I was proud to know this boy who, with heartfelt words, was winning the audience to his side. Even Lady Caroline was wavering.

"...Playgrounds and swings, football pitches and a bit of green grass don't mean a thing to us kids," Nicko said. "What we want is clothes on our backs, food in our stomachs and a fire that never goes out in the kitchen."

He stopped then and I knew it was the right moment. Everyone had been charged with emotion; some of the ladies round about me were actually wiping tears away from their eyes.

When Nicko came down from the platform there was clapping and cheering. All he did was tug at my arm and say: "Scram!"

We scrammed—past the startled man on the door and out into the street.

The gang of children was still there and Nicko stood in

front of them. The group made a strange guard of honour as the Town Hall emptied. Someone dropped a sixpence into my hand and every child was given some tip

"Well," said Nicko on the way home, "I reckon that should do the trick." He had collected five shillings and Mr. Chantry had paused to have a word with him and had taken his name and address. Lady Caroline, too, had given him a warm smile.

Overnight Nicko Parsons became the Boy Wonder. The local paper had sent along a reporter to the meeting and a full story appeared and it was all about Nicko and his brave speech.

Two months later they started to build the factory. Now there was employment for builders and carpenters, plasterers and painters and decorators. Life in our northern town suddenly started to look up. By the end of the year the men were queueing for jobs, and my father came home one night smiling and I knew his faith had been rewarded. When Mother produced the baby, it was decked out in new clothes—something as yet unheard-of in our family. And when the time came for my father to decide if I should go to the Grammar, he didn't hesitate. I had my new uniform and my eyes on the future. I would be a teacher and nothing was going to stop me.

Nicko and his family moved away long before the factory was completed. Lady Caroline had found work for Nicko's father on a farm in the country. So my friendship with the cheeky, freckle-faced, fearless boy was ended. I missed him, but since it was not a habit in those days to communicate with anyone who had left the street, we didn't write letters to each other.

I never expected to see Nicko Parsons again. But twenty years later, when I was teaching at our old junior school, he walked in one day. He was paying a nostalgic visit to the town and the school was part of his memories. Nicko was a farmer now and he still had a cropped ginger head and freckles amid the warm tan on his face.

We shook hands, and when the bell released me at the end of the school day, we walked together in the direction of the Factory.

"Still going strong, I see," he said.

"Yes," I answered. "It went over to aircraft supplies in the war, but now it's back to making machine tools and spares

for cars. Today it employs more than a thousand people." I glanced sideways at my old friend. "All due to you, of course."

He threw back his head and laughed. "I took them all in, didn't I? Yet I knew my own father would never work there and nor would I for that matter. The open air and the country was all we ever wanted."

"So you had no ulterior motive," I said, "in spite of your fine speech that day at the Town Hall. You had the women in tears with your ragged appearance and your clever words. I must say, if you didn't want a job for your father or yourself later, you went to a lot of trouble—all that petition business and even breaking into the building to storm the meeting!"

Nicko was smiling, the past as near to him now, I was sure, as it was to me. "Ah, but I did have a motive and a strong one." He paused, staring up at the great factory that in the dark days of the Depression had brought salvation to so many men.

"It was the park-keeper, Coggin, you see. I hated him like I've never hated anyone since. A real thorn in my side he was. He pinched my one and only possession when I was a kid. It was a car tyre. I used it as a hoop, do you remember?"

"Yes, and Coggin took it away from you?"

Nicko nodded slowly. "He said I had ruined his rotten old cabbage patch with it and then he burnt it on a bonfire. Do you know, I howled for a week after that."

Suddenly Nicko smiled at the long-ago memory. "When you're a kid, things like that matter. So I vowed I'd get my own back."

"And did you?" I asked.

"Of course." Nicko gave another of his thunderous laughs. 'He got the sack, didn't he? If there wasn't a park then there couldn't be a keeper. That was my whole plan. Maybe I was a vindictive little monster, but that old car tyre was my pride and joy."

That evening Nicko and I had a couple of drinks together before he returned to the country and his farm.

I hadn't liked to tell him. Some things are better left unsaid. Only Coggin was the factory's first shop-labourer and he kept the job until he retired.

But naturally I didn't tell Nicko. You see, I wanted to send him away still laughing.

© Leone Stewart 1966

IT IS LONELY

BY JOHN SIBLY

"SO you have bought my great-uncle's telescope, I see," said the little man with the pointed beard who had been conspicuous, despite his failure to bid, in the saleroom during the auction.

"I have bought Lot 159," said Canford, not very warmly.

"Yes. It belonged to my great-uncle, Barzillai Stringford. He discovered Stringford's Comet with it in 1887. And they named a crater on the moon after him. That's something to have done with your life—to have got a part of the moon named after you."

"Yes," said Canford. He did not want to sound encouraging. Until this bearded nuisance came up with his family history he had been busy working out how to move the splendid six-inch instrument to his home, eleven miles away.

"Here is my card," said the little man. He produced a big piece of pasteboard printed with the name:

Joshua N. Stringford,
North Star Insurance Company,
Nottingham.

"Thank you, but I don't intend to insure it just now," said Canford. It was rude, but he really did find the other's attentions infuriating.

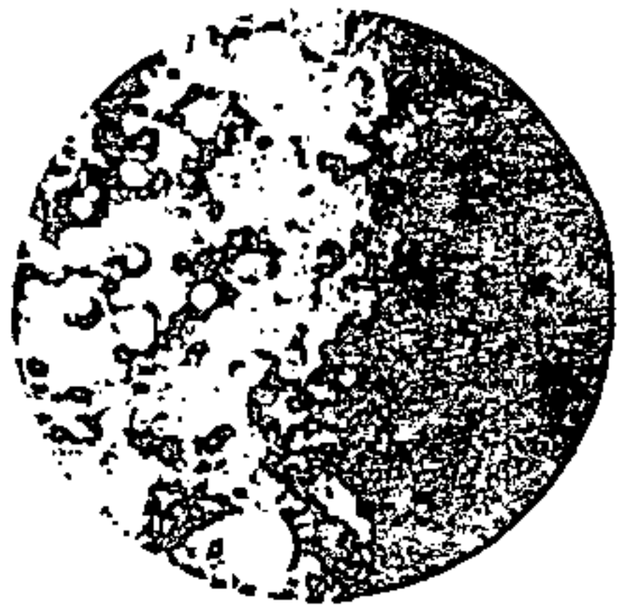
"The North Star is solely a Life office, sir," said Joshua Stringford with some dignity. "But to be frank, if you were to ask me for a proposal form now, I couldn't honestly advise our firm to accept you."

Canford made no reply to what he took as a piece of insolence.

"I merely hoped you would compare the name with that engraved on the instrument," said the other, with unaltered politeness.

Canford strode across to his purchase and looked at the plate riveted to the tube near the focusing-wheel. He knew there

HERE



was such an inscription, but hadn't bothered to read it till now. It said, *Presented to Barzillai Stringford, Esq., on his retirement from the Professorship of Physics at Ruchester College, 1884.*

Canford was not impressed by this. Clearly, the intrusive fellow had noticed the similarity of name and was now trading on it. "I see," he said.

"Almost too big for a garden stand, isn't it?" the other went on, touching affectionately the heavy wooden tripod by which the massive tube was upheld. "It fits very nicely on to an equatorial mounting; you see these swivels—" he indicated two bands, or clamps "—my uncle always mounted it so in the observatory on the roof of his house. But you will never have heard of his comet or his crater. Nobody remembers him now."

Canford felt further annoyance. He remembered both of them perfectly well. A scientist by training, he had gone into the family electrical firm from sense of duty; it took up much of his time, but provided him with money and sometimes equipment to indulge his hobby of astronomy as much as he liked.

"It was a fumarole, not a crater," he said crushingly.

"Yes, only a small parasitic cone on the side of a greater volcano. But all the big features had been named during the seventeenth century. It was a great honour for anything to be named after you at the end of the nineteenth."

"Yes," Canford said absently.

"You'll find the star-diagonal convenient," the little man went on. "The eyepiece is bound to come down near the floor when you look at anything near the zenith. And the prism in it needs cleaning—there's a certain amount of fungus on the glass. The micrometer eyepiece is in really splendid condition, however."

It was a little odd, thought Canford; there was nothing about any of this in the catalogue, where the eyepieces and other

fittings were merely referred to as *Box of Lenses.* And the box he knew to be locked; he hadn't got the key from the auctioneer yet.

"Thank you for your advice," he said, a little more warmly. "When I examine the lenses this evening I'll make full use of it, I assure you. Possibly—" he felt inclined now to make up for his previous unkindness "—when I have it mounted, you'd care to come and have a look one evening . . ."

But Mr. Stringford wasn't enthusiastic. "Oh no, I shall never look through it again," he said. "We used to, as boys, you know, when it stood in my father's study, after his uncle's death. But he soon stopped it. He was afraid we'd go the way his uncle went."

"Went?"

"A family tragedy," said Mr. Stringford sadly. "Have you ever thought, it isn't right for men to stare out through the blue walls of our world into the mysteries and splendours of space?"

"No, I never have," said Canford shortly.

"This beautiful lens—" Mr. Stringford touched the milled brass ring of the great six-inch aperture, off which Canford had taken the brass dewcap "—I often think of as a porthole in the side of this great liner of ours, cruising the seas of heaven. Sometimes, you know, the stewards come round on a voyage and put the deadlights on the portholes. Well, the deadlight—" he tapped the dewcap in Canford's hand "—ought to be kept on this one."

Canford replaced it on the great diminishing mirror which was, for the moment, the lens. "Well, it's on now," he said.

"If you'll do me a favour, please take this card," said Mr. Stringford, holding out again the bit of pasteboard. "I don't want to insure your life, but I should like to *en*sure it—if I can."

"You are very good," said Canford, wondering whether, despite his commonplace air and respectable occupation, his acquaintance was not deranged.

"Not at all. Goodnight." He turned and walked, with his habitual melancholy—it must be worth much to an insurance agent, thought Canford the businessman, as a reminder to clients of the uncertainty of human life—across a room cumbered with flotsam from solid Victorian family houses.

Canford went and got the key of the lenses' case, arranged for the telescope to be picked up, and left.

After tea that evening he unlocked the heavy teak case and

looked at the treasures nestling on the faded red velvet within. Mr. Stringford had certainly reason to be proud of the family heirloom. They were beautiful pieces of Victorian craftsmanship, each worth far more now than when originally turned; solid stoppers and plugs of brass, with apertures of varying sizes for the eye to peep through; the higher powers no bigger than a pinhole. Here was a Barlow lens, here the sun- and there the star-diagonal, a right-angled junction of dull brass pipes containing the prism which reflected the image sideways so the watcher need not stoop when looking through the eye-piece. He examined it carefully; yes, there were spots on the glistening prism—that strange fungus, doubtless, which will grow even on glass. He spent some time with spirit and a clean camel-hair brush teasing them away. The micrometer too, was a collector's piece.

He no longer doubted Mr. Stringford's identity and put his card in the case with the lenses. Then he thought there was time to look up the celebrated great-uncle, before undertaking the observations he had planned for that night.

"Stringford, Barzillai Nathan," he read. His eyes skimmed the biographical details and the account of his astronomical work, with which he was already familiar in outline:

> In 1884, he retired from the Professorship of Physics which he had held at Ruchester College since its foundation, and became Principal of Carpenter College, Worfield, where he remained during the important period in which it became the University College of that town. Despite temporary celebrity outside the scientific world caused by his priority in observing the comet of 1887 and in calculating its orbit, this was not the happiest period of Stringford's life. A deep-seated melancholy, hereditary in the family, clouded what should have been the most enjoyable, as it was the most fruitful, part of his career.
>
> In 1890, his eminence in observational astronomy was recognised when one of the parasitic cones of the lunar crater Huygens, hitherto known only by a letter and a number, was given his name by the Astronomical Congress of that year. But when, in 1892, he obtained the incorporation of the University College, he retired from his post against all the expectations of his colleagues and gave himself up entirely to his astronomical work. His nervous depression, however, against which medical science proved powerless, never left him till his death in 1894. (University publications: private information.)

Undoubtedly, thought Canford, a family tragedy was concealed, as so often, behind the reticent language. By the time he had finished reading, however, the sky was darkening and he hastened outside to begin his observations.

Next morning there was a letter postmarked *Nottingham* which Canford had no time to read. The workmen arrived soon after breakfast to begin constructing the observatory to house his new acquisition. He gave his instructions and they began their work on the thick concrete roof of a storeroom at the back of his house, from which one could sweep the whole southern sky. Then he went off to the works to see the drawing-office about an equatorial mounting. Finally he took two more men and set off for the saleroom to collect the telescope.

The rest of the day flew by in a rush of work and soon Canford was home again, looking at the darkening sky and at the huge telescope, like a massive gun, which filled one end of his library. He paused to admire the splendid poise of the instrument on its great staggered trunnions; then, opening the glass doors which gave on his long dark garden, he removed the dewcap, clipped on the wooden handles, dangling from their brass universal joints like Indian clubs, selected a suitable eyepiece and pushed it into the tube from which he had extracted the tompion.

Outside it was the first quarter; beginning to gleam through the thickening twilight, the moon glanced on the object-lens of the instrument and seemed itself a lens half-shrouded, glistening back at the great eye of glass now staring up at it. Canford shifted the instrument by hand till the moon appeared in the star-finder; then he took the Indian clubs in his hands and began to steer the tube after the swiftly-moving satellite. Easily he caught a patch of the terminator; then he put his eye to the stream of light emitted by the low-power eyepiece. A touch on the focusing-wheel and the moon's surface came vividly into view; it had the strange stereoscopic look it always takes in a telescope at this phase, the mountains standing up as if modelled out of clay.

Though Canford had looked through more powerful instruments, he had never possessed one which gave anything like this image. He revelled in it for a while, and then turned to a lunar chart. A glance back from the chart to the eyepiece confirmed his first thought—the lunar dawn was crossing the crater Triesnecker: its eastern half stood out like a miniature crescent moon; the western side was at present overflowed by the shadow which filled it to the eclipse of its central hill.

Huygens itself was visible, a little below it; in another day it would be laid almost bare by the receding tide of shadow.

He turned the instrument away, roamed cursorily other areas of the moon, then went on to Jupiter and Saturn, visible together low down over the dark garden trees. Then he put the dewcap on and, with another instrument, proceeded with his programme.

Next afternoon he was back while it was still light, and examined with satisfaction the drum of brick and cement under construction on the concrete roof.

He set up the instrument again after tea, and again brought the moon's terminator into the field. Yes, there was Huygens, the eastern peaks glittering in the lunar dawn. The western half was sheared away by the great Rift Valley which split the crater and made in it a right-angled turn, causing, perhaps, that strain on the moon's surface which had produced the numerous tiny vents and fumaroles supposed to be dotted about the spurs of the mountain.

But as he watched, yesterday's feeling of elation, which he had at first recaptured, thinned and disappeared. The icy solitude, the stony loneliness of that freezing wilderness touched him with its immense melancholy. An image rose unbidden into his mind: a row of brooding pinnacles of grey withered rock, capping a crater's lip with their sterile spires. They were wrinkled and weathered fantastically, like gargoyles; evil faces stonily gazing at distances of stone. Suddenly, one of the summits spread two vast grey wings, stretched itself, rose on grim claws and then, rock-coloured, lifted itself off the blunter apex of the rock and flapped mournfully away over the endless lunar plain. It was a fancy, he knew. Where there was no air there could be no birds. Yet how had such a fancy come into his mind?

He swung the instrument away to Jupiter once more and to Saturn; but they seemed infinitely far in the depth of the sky—small golden buoys swimming on a huge dark sea. Once the bright bulk of the moon was taken from the object-glass, Canford felt his whole personality would stream down the narrowing tube of the instrument and spend all its vital energy in the great emptiness of space. He was glad to return to his calculations.

As he was going to bed, an envelope, unopened on the library desk, caught his eye. It was the one delivered yesterday with the Nottingham postmark. He tore it open.

Dear Mr. Canford,

Presuming on our meeting yesterday, I write to thank you once more for your very kind invitation to look through the Cooke telescope, which is almost the only remaining material link with my family's past. But I must again decline it, and in doing so, would ask you to recall my words before we separated.

I know nothing of other telescopes, but experience has taught me this is one whose deadlight should be permanently closed. What do men hope to see by peering out through a gap in the bulwarks of distance at the passing seas of ether, and the stony reefs which break their surface here and there? The Sirens, perhaps. Now that men are beginning to put out in small lifeboats from this liner of ours, it seems to me doubly dangerous.

Forgive me if I intrude, but believe me, I shall be only too glad if I can be of any future help.

Yours sincerely,
J. Stringford

Canford put this letter down on the desk instead of thrusting it into the waste-paper basket, as he would have done a few hours ago.

The unpleasant impression left by the letter and the observations which had preceded it lasted well into the next morning, but the bustle of the works and office drove it from his mind, and when he returned rather late in the evening, he was again eager to test the capacities of the instrument. He went to some time and trouble in fitting the Barlow lens, intending to use it in his survey of the planets. A Barlow lens inserted in the tube, almost doubles a telescope's magnifying power, though of course it reduces the illumination of the object greatly, and also has the annoying characteristic of producing "ghosts"—that is, additional images of the object, very faint, caused by reflection from the surface of the glass.

Tonight, as Canford used it on the two great planets in the south-western sky, there was indeed a fainter image swimming beside the golden bead of Jupiter and the wedding-ring of Saturn.

Wearying of these, he decided to try the new fitting on the moon, dimmed this evening by a suspicion of haze. As he expected, the tiring brightness of the glaring surface was pleasantly diffused by the device, and for a while he roamed the lunar surface with that feeling of power a telescope provides.

Already the western surface was flat and lacking in contrast as the sun rose higher and the terminator crept eastwards. For the moment, however, the irritating Barlow image was absent; perhaps the extra lens had contracted slightly and so changed its curvature infinitesimally in the cool tube. But when he reached Huygens and sought the eastern slope on which he had hoped to find Stringford, the double image returned: a faint halo outside the glow of the moon itself.

And then suddenly the moon disappeared as his attention shifted, and what he was looking at was no longer the great, pitted celestial clinker, but a face—very faint, and as if reflected dimly from the surface of plate-glass—with a look of haunting sadness which seemed to embody all the mournful sensations from which Canford himself had begun to suffer on the previous night. And then, again without his volition, his attention switched to the primary image, and he was looking at the moon once more. Huygens had shifted a little in the moments which had passed; it would need a touch on the azimuth handle to bring it back into the centre of the field. But Canford did not give that touch.

So unpleasant were the sensations he had experienced while examining Huygens and so vivid was the vision of the melancholy face, that he determined to put the whole thing out of his mind and to examine the moon no more till the turret on top of his storeroom should be ready.

But during the next day, when work should have driven all such thoughts out of his head, the face kept recurring, so sad, so distant, and so lost, that when he reached home in the evening he changed his mind. The only thing to do now, he decided, was to set up the instrument and look at that sector of the moon carefully, without the Barlow lens to distract him with its annoying double image.

This, accordingly, he did. For a while he tested the resolving power of the telescope on some of the more difficult double stars. In this he was singularly successful. Despite the difficulty of catching the tiny points of light in the pinhole aperture of the high-power lenses he employed, the instrument handled beautifully and the small gem-like images it produced were another tribute to the excellence of the object-glass. At length, when the moon was well clear of the horizon, he turned the telescope in that direction and, carefully, deliberately, sought out Triesnecker and Huygens.

To do so, he felt sure, would dispel all morbid imaginings—and in this he was proved perfectly right. The only slight

difficulty was to find the craters; the moon was three-quarters full and the area above the Mare Imbrium, now far from the jagged terminator, was one flat white glare with no shadows to define anything; only over the south-polar horizon did the summits of the Leibnitz range glitter enticingly to new discoverers. Huygens was almost indistinguishable, and Stringford might never have existed. Lenses, shades, were tried in vain; even the Barlow lens was called in, but nothing could be found.

The moon, a tight, glistening ball of ice, though jaggedly melted and frayed at the eastern edge, filled the aperture of the telescope completely, even under the lowest power; there was no possibility that one's sympathies, one's self, might pour down the celestial tube and diffuse in the wilderness of space. All that had been necessary, Canford realised, was that he should take a firm grip on himself...

The next two nights were passed in calculation and the episode of the Barlow ghost was forgotten. Meanwhile, the moon grew full. The terminator, the line dividing light from darkness, on which the dawn-lit mountains stand up craggily in shadowy contrast to the flatness of the noonday area, advanced to the edge of the satellite and lipped over it, leaving the whole ball a flat silver disc, the worst of all phases for observation. And then the other terminator appeared at the western edge as the moon passed to its aphelion and drew nearer to the sun.

Gradually the tide of darkness lapped over the features which had been the first to know the light: creeks and gullies filled with shadow; darkness poured into craters and filled them to the brim. Gradually it advanced eastward, the receding light bringing out entirely new shapes and peering into quite different features of the satellite, which it had left unexplored in its morning advance. Canford, however, steadfastly refused to look at the moon. He had other work to do and dismissed the matter from his mind. Mr. Stringford's letter lay unanswered on his desk.

And then, one night, he fitted up the instrument on the lawn, intending to look at the "Horse's Head" in Orion if the sky was not too bright, and at the Andromeda nebula. It would not be necessary to carry it out on to the lawn much longer; the men had been up that day about the equatorial mounting, begun a fortnight ago, and the tin dome of the little observatory was already in position. Once again he was enchanted

with the instrument and decided to leave it in position till midnight, when the circumpolar constellations would have swung into a better position.

The night remained clear and, after making his study of the northern sky, he searched other areas in quest of the more spectacular telescopic binaries. For some time after he began to do so, he was aware of a strong white glow in the eastern sky where the moon was rising; and, before he had finished, it was well clear of the garden trees, lying almost on its back, the western terminator gnawed and pitted by the eroding darkness. He had no interest in the moon now and did not bother to look at it; but while he was sweeping an area of the eastern sky he noticed the bright glare which announces its proximity.

Determined to avoid it, he twisted the azimuth grip and, in his anxiety, made the elementary mistake of turning the telescope away from the apparent, not the real, position of the moon, so that, of course, in the astronomical world where everything is upside down, the moon shot at once into view. Indeed, in his attempts to slow down its dizzy swing, he turned the telescope farther into the field; a narrow band of the moon's surface moved under the scrutiny of the high-power lens, as though the instrument were seeking some spot on the planet of its own volition. And it was, in fact, without any conscious effort on Canford's part that the great tube stopped on the now familiar formation of Huygens.

The crater looked wholly different in the withdrawing light. Its western slopes were already almost invaded by shadow, and on the eastern side, in the still visible sun, a number of faint pocks or flecks were apparent, which he had not observed before. Clearly, these, now cupping the scraps of shade which made them visible, were the fumaroles of which Stringford was doubtless one.

He felt in his pocket for paper and pencil to sketch them, so as to compare them with a lunar chart. But as he did so, the object-glass suddenly centred one of them, and Canford felt, sweeping over him like the tide of darkness engulfing the lunar world, the identical but greatly magnified melancholy he had experienced in his earlier survey of the area. So intense and powerful was it that he removed his eye abruptly from the vivid pinhole of this celestial peepshow lest all the virtue that was in him should stream away down its conduit into emptiness. As he stepped back the feeling lessened in intensity, but remained strongly and horribly with him while he dismantled the instrument and went up to bed.

That night Canford had a dream. The scenery was that of his earlier vision, except that no grey vultures capped like fossils the steep peaks of the lunar range. Amid the grey, bleak foothills the shadows were glossily black. Canford took the central feature of the picture to be a shadow, till he realised it was a man clad in deep black clothes. He was sitting at the edge of the shade with which his garments made one continuous mass. His head was sunk in an attitude of infinite dejection.

As Canford looked, he stirred, however, and slowly lifted his face. When the light fell upon it Canford needed to look no more. It was the face of the Barlow ghost. Loneliness, infinite and unbearable loneliness, was written upon the countenance; a loneliness to which the earth, or even the space capsule, with its wireless telephone, can provide no parallel.

So disturbed was Canford by it all next day that even people in the office noticed it. He could not concentrate on the work about which he usually made such swift decisions; once, he caught himself tracing with an office pen on the clean blotting-pad on the manager's desk; and, when he looked at what he had written, found he had formed the words, *It is lonely here.*

The discovery of the state into which he was slipping led him to unaccustomed self-examination. He saw that for years past he had been living a strange double life, one part given up to other human beings and life's ostensible business; the rest devoted to loneliness among the skies. And gradually, he now understood, the nocturnal and celestial part had been gaining strangely on the other.

The arrival of a cup of office tea and the need to thank the bringer, enabled him to pull himself abruptly out of his reverie. There must be no more nonsense, he decided briskly; the fancy should be expelled by exactly the same means as had been so successful last time. He would sit up for the moon that night, and when it was clear of the turbulent horizon, he would look right into the mysterious volcanic pipe.

But later, as he sat waiting in his study while the hours ticked away to twelve, doubts began to assail him. Was he not giving way to just the sort of morbid notion he had sworn to avoid? And other thoughts came to him, unbidden; old stories of the mysterious and malign power of the waning moon—the Witches' Crescent. All superstitious nonsense, of course; but why had his impressions been so much more vivid this time than last?

He was almost glad when, towards midnight, the sky clouded over and gave him an excuse not to unpack the instrument.

But just as he was thinking of going to bed, the eastern fringes of the cloud took fire; soon they parted, giving a wide, clear bay; and into this, a little after one o'clock, swung the corroded hemisphere he was awaiting.

It would be cowardice to go back now. He set up the telescope at once, without waiting for the moon to clear irregularities of the lower air, fearing clouds would occult it once again. Then, fitting the tube with the most powerful eyepiece he possessed, he picked up Huygens in the star-finder.

As soon as he focused, he found he was on the crater. The eastern gullies were now picked out by the advancing shade. Among them, visible by instants through the turbulence of the heated atmosphere here, so close to the horizon, were the fumaroles, each now a profound well of shade, with a perspective of its own; one could even see into them a little from the light that lingered inside each western lip. Then he centred the one which, yesterday, had coincided with the terrible flux of melancholy. It was of course the writhing air near the horizon which was responsible, but it seemed to Canford that something was stirring down there; stirring, trying to climb out.

As his hand had traced unbidden the words *It is lonely here*, so now, unbidden into his head, as though murmured in his ears by the Fiend who so troubled Christian in the Valley of Humiliation, came the words, *Join me.* The speck of shadow in the well stirred more violently—seemed to be detaching itself; the words *Join me, join me!* grew louder till they were positively ringing in his ears. He felt a sudden and tremendous efflux of his vitality up the tube, as though, if he could not drag himself away from it, his whole personality—nay, his soul—would disappear into the illimitable heavens.

Collecting the last of his strength he made the effort, and stood erect. Still weak and unutterably depressed, he turned his back on it and tottered into his library.

His eye fell to where Mr. Stringford's letter still lay unanswered among scraps of paper on the desk. One phrase seemed to jump from the page as he looked at it: *whose deadlight should be permanently closed.* Following its advice he went back into the garden and, resisting the strong, unhallowed temptation to set his eye again to the tube, picked up the great brass dewcap and put it firmly into place.

At once he felt much better, and soon was strong enough to take the great instrument indoors. Then he went upstairs to spend the rest of the night in restlessness and in dim, confused nightmare.

Next day he telephoned the office that he would be late, and lingered after breakfast, pensively regarding the instrument and Mr. Stringford's letter. Suddenly he remembered he had not put away the high-power lens, which was still plugging the eyepiece tube. As he restored it to the box, his eye fell upon the sun-diagonal, the one part of the instrument he had never yet employed. He took it out of its soft nest of worn velvet; underneath it was a bit of folded paper. He unfolded it. The writing which covered one side was in good black ink, the rounded yet fine quill-pen script of seventy years ago.

> *Je vois ces effroyables espaces qui m'enferment*—no, it is not their size but their solitude that is terrifying. It is said that the study of the stars first moved men's mind to philosophy; equally it may move the soundest mind to madness. Men one day will break the bounds which gravity sets upon this planet as surely as Columbus broke the bounds set by the sea; let them beware of the infinite loneliness of the sky. For though such voyages are yet forbidden to our bodies, the soul may dwell up there when it will, and I who write this know it is as possible for the soul to be lost among the wildernesses of the lunar solitudes as it is for the body to wander lost in the Sahara.
>
> Let those who follow in my track beware by my example, and take warning from one outwardly brought fame and acclamation by this pursuit of the unattainable.

Later, clearly, had been added—in writing much altered yet still the same—the words, *Pray for the soul of BNS, lost 29th March 1894.*

Canford had the curiosity to turn up the date in an old Nautical Almanac; it was a day of half-moon. He mentioned as much when he wrote to Joshua Stringford thanking him for his letter and enclosing what, he said, appeared to be a family paper. In return he received a courteous note thanking him for the paper and offering him a photograph Mr. Stringford had recently found of his celebrated forebear.

Thank you for your offer, wrote Canford in the last of the letters that passed between them. *I would prefer, however, not to have a photograph of your great-uncle; I feel I know him well already. Though I shall not accept your gift I shall take your advice; I find the telescope can be used quite well except at the first and last quarters, but I shall keep it in future to show to visitors as an interesting link with a great man, and not for my own use.*

© John Sibly 1966

BY FELIX MARTI-IBANEZ

Waltz

THE MUSIC SWIRLED AROUND THEM IN SOFT WAVES, GAINING MOMENTUM, STRONGER AND FASTER, UNTIL THEY WERE ENGULFED

IT WAS not quite midnight, but the roulette room at the casino in Nice was already practically deserted. At the only open table the croupier called out, "*Rien ne va plus,*" as solemnly as if he were proclaiming the Day of Judgment. The tiny ivory ball was already spinning and skipping, pursuing itself endlessly, when Madame Olga Chaillon's sun-tanned arm slithered like a golden serpent over the green felt and placed her bet.

"*Cinq, noir, impair et manqué,*" chanted the croupier.

Turning to her companion with the air of an empress, Madame Chaillon looked at him with imperious deep-violet eyes and said, "Raoul, I've run out of chips."

Her companion gave her a strained smile, and his small white teeth above his squared black dinner jacket made him look like a domino piece. "So have I, *chérie*, quite a while ago, and what's worse, I have no more money with me."

"Always the same stupid story," she muttered angrily, inserting a cigarette in a diamond-studded holder.

"Tonight you have lost more than ever, Olga."

"All the more reason to continue."

"The hotel is very far from here," he protested, lighting her cigarette.

"Nothing is far in Nice," she snapped, leaving the table.

He watched her walk away—tall, statuesque, magnificently haughty, a toy for an Asiatic king. Her golden hair was

© Felix Marti-Ibanez 1965

wound in a thick roll at the back of her head, and her neck and shoulders, emerging gracefully from a low-cut décolletage, had exquisite lines of liquid softness. Her full-blown sensuous body was clearly outlined by a shimmering gold silk gown that seemed to have grown on her, like feathers.

"Olga," he called, following her to the next *salon,* where an orchestra was playing. "If you wish, I'll go to the hotel."

When she looked at him all the stars in the sky of Nice seemed to glow in her violet eyes.

"I'm sure we're going to win, Raoul. I'll wait for you here," she said, sitting down on a sofa.

Raoul stared at her as if he could not tear himself away. "Your eyes are irresistible and you know it," he whispered.

"I've been told that so many times, my dear Raoul. I'm beginning to despair of ever meeting someone who'll say something different. Not that it doesn't sound lovely when you say it," she added politely. "But hurry, darling."

When he had disappeared down the stairs, Madame Chaillon looked around the room. A few people were dancing, but the air already bore the sadness peculiar to the month of October in Nice. The casino was beginning to look like a castle at the end of the season; when only the servants remain, quietly moving to and fro, covering the furniture, putting away the silver candelabra.

The woman's gaze, following the diamond-studded line of her cigarette holder, was suddenly arrested by a great mass of grey-streaked dark hair. A man sat at the other end of the sofa, his eyes fixed with a distant look on the sparkling crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling. His bold, dark-skinned profile, sharply silhouetted against the glowing background, had the impassivity of an Aztec idol.

Now Madame Chaillon all her life had been moved by an intense curiosity about men. She could be as passionately interested in their personalities as in their bank accounts. Raoul was away attending to her present financial needs, and this handsome stranger with the faraway look intrigued her.

"Would you please tell me the time?" she asked him, her voice caressing, her body slightly leaning forward as if poised to spring.

The stranger turned and their eyes met. His remained indifferent, betraying no admiration, no acknowledgment of her beauty. They were beautiful eyes, large, set wide apart, of a warm green, like grapes in the summer sun. His swarthy face, embroidered by sun and wind, might have been that of

a seaman. She had met many men in her life, but never one so strange, so remote, so unapproachable.

Before the stranger had time to answer her, a large clock nearby solemnly began to strike midnight.

"Man's invention forestalls him," he said. "Midnight, the hour when spirits wander abroad." He paused. "Tonight they're celestial spirits, enveloped in bewitching clouds of perfume."

This sounds more promising, thought Olga. And suddenly, more than anything else she wanted this man to become interested in her.

"I wanted the time, not a compliment." Her voice was deliberately cold, but her body, leaning closer to the stranger, betrayed her interest.

"And I had no hopes of finding anything here besides my own dreams. But night is always kind to poets."

"Are you a poet?"

"No, but *you* are poetry."

"You're being carried away."

"Not at all. I'm sincere. I would like to ask you a favour. Will you dance with me?"

"I don't dance with strangers."

"Oh, but I think dancing is a waste of time. Most people dance so that they need not talk. What I meant was, will you *talk* this dance with me?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I mean that I neither wish to dance nor am I able to. You see, I lost a leg in the war and its substitute permits me very little in the way of acrobatics. But I should be so happy to talk this dance with you."

"I'm so sorry. Yes, I'd love to talk this dance with you. It's a waltz, my favourite music."

But they remained silent for a while. The waltz swirled around them in soft waves, at first gently and then, gaining momentum, stronger and faster, until they were completely engulfed by the whirlpool of music.

"Let's not introduce ourselves," he said, looking at her with unyielding eyes. And she, accustomed to subduing men with just one glance from her violet eyes, was all the more intrigued.

"We'll talk while the waltz lasts," he continued, "and then we'll part, like two cars passing each other on a lonely road at night, leaving behind only the memory of their blazing lights. I'm glad it's a waltz. The waltz is the most heavenly of all dances. It is the celestial spheric empire of romance. It

makes one crave to leave the earth, to become a winged creature and soar into space. Have you ever noticed that people waltzing look like birds trying to fly for the first time? I love waltzes, all waltzes. Chopin's waltzes are sprinkled with moonlight and the dust of white lilies; the majestic waltzes in grand opera conjure visions of vast Gothic cathedrals; the sentimental waltzes at country fairs make young girls sigh and dream far into the night—and the elegant waltzes at court balls, all pomp and glitter—I love them all. But waltzes can also be cruel. There was a cruel waltz in my youth I shall never forget."

He paused. The waves of the waltz swelled and rolled through the warm air, encircling them, engulfing them. Olga's eyes were riveted on the stranger's luminous green eyes that seemed determined to ignore her beauty, which had ruined so many men.

"It was in this same casino," he went on, with a tom-tom-like resonance in his voice, "too many years ago. In those days people staked *louis d'or*. Gold epaulets, diamond studs and tiaras, shimmering brocades and satins, towering plumes—all these gravitated to the tables. I was a young student then, so young that I believed I could capture in the net of my youth the wayward butterfly of Fortune. I gambled and lost.

"Next to me sat a woman. She was in her fifties. On her body a battle was raging between youth's slenderness and the plumpness of middle age. Her hair was bleached a bright gold, and her faded blue eyes were already framed by a web of fine lines. She played with that arrogance that wealth imparts to some people. For each humble one-hundred-franc chip I played, she tossed down a handful of gold pieces. And cruel Fortune smiled at her, while it mocked me and brought ruin upon my head. With realising it, we became fascinated by one another, she probably because of the anguish on my face every time I lost, and I because of her fabulous luck.

"Three hours and several thousand francs later I had lost every franc I owned in the world, while in front of her, small heaps of gold glittered like a pirate's booty. With empty pockets, I staggered to my feet and went out on the balcony for some fresh air. After a few seconds I smelled her perfume next to me. In her hands her small purse bulged with the money she had won. She spoke to me kindly, but I was angry at myself for having lost and at her for having won. When she asked me to have a glass of champagne with her for better luck, I accepted.

"She told me that she was alone and very wealthy. She was at that age when women, aware that autumn has come and is slowly shrouding them in its withered mask of gold, desperately search for the greenness of a young man's love. We went to her hotel. On her balcony, remembering all the time that I had no money for rent or food, I spoke of love to her. She came to my arms and the moon above seemed to be mocking me. It was then that I heard the waltz. The melancholy notes floated through the air, fusing with the moonlight, whirling around us, drenching us in nostalgia. I remembered again that I was penniless; I thought of my broken dreams, my studies in Paris. The blue sorcery of the waltz merged with the moonlight. Suddenly, bursting with fury, I pushed her away. I called her old, fat, ugly. I cried out that all her money could not buy one single kiss, one single caress of mine, and I rushed out of her room happy, as though I had had my revenge on Fortune. As I flung open the door, the woman's sobs reached me mixed with the wailing strains of the waltz."

The stranger was silent again. Olga, like a timid butterfly, was caught in the magic web of his words, hypnotised by the unflinching look in his baffling eyes.

"I have collected many waltzes in my life," he went on, a fleeting smile softening the roughly carved features.

"One night in Algeria, while on sentry duty under a merciless white moon at a post of the French Foreign Legion, I was suddenly seized with the *cafard*. I stripped off my clothes and under the glaring moon I danced naked on the cold desert sand, intoxicated with Pinot and nostalgia. The distant howling of hyenas was my only music, but to my feverish mind it was the wail of a waltz played by Tziganes.

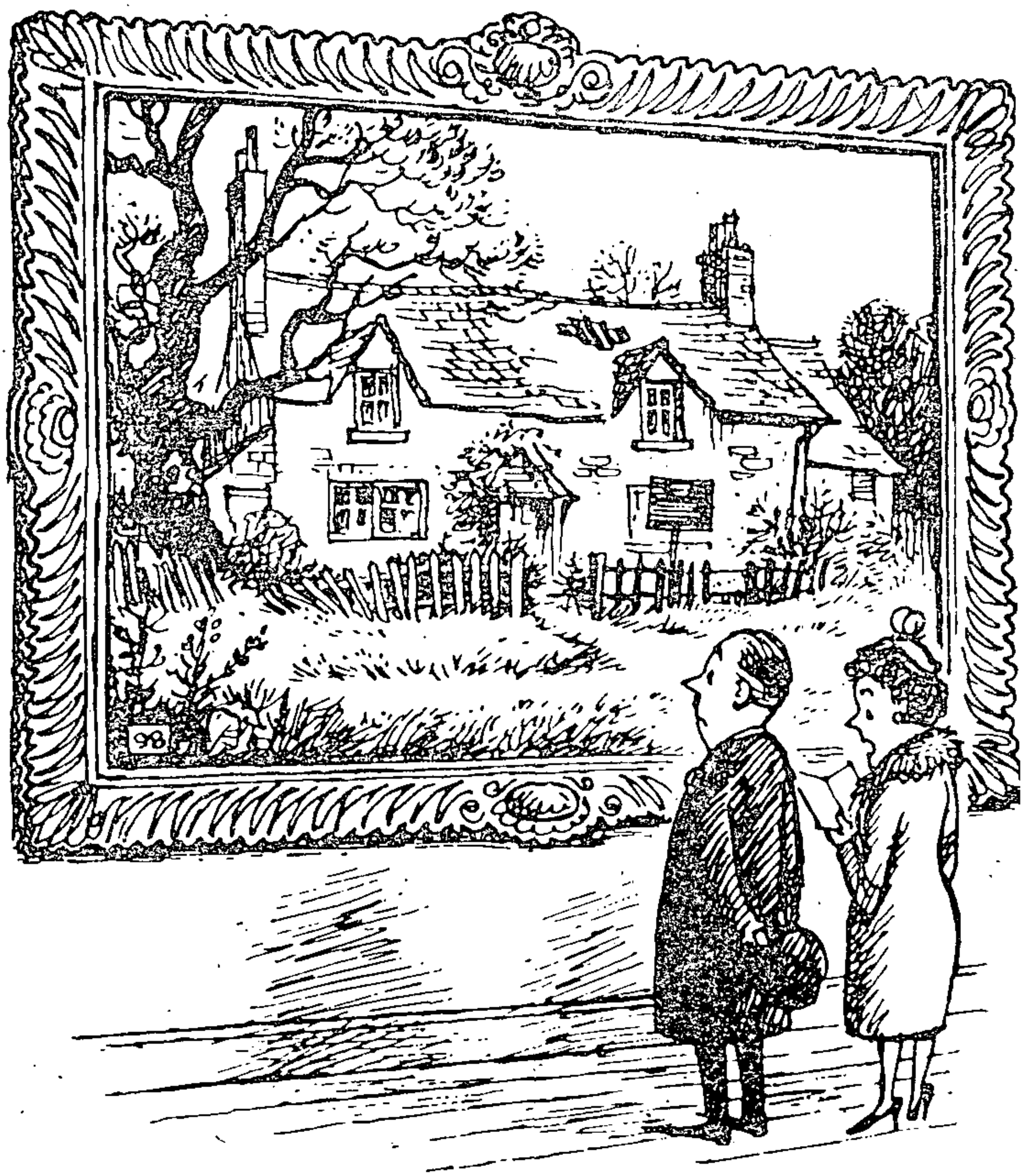
"And I remember the waltz of the winds over the ocean, the waves whirling like leaves, and the waltz of the winds through the forests, the leaves whirling like waves.

"There was also the fatal waltz I danced in Brittany with a peasant girl in an abandoned cottage. The gramophone we were playing was so old it made the waltz sound like the wail of someone in pain. With that feeble spurt of music we wanted to drown out the torrent of explosives that enemy planes were dropping on the village. And then a bomb blew up the cottage, the girl, the waltz, and all possibility of my ever dancing again."

Olga, sighing, moved closer to the inscrutable eyes. Suddenly Raoul's head appeared at the top of the stairs.

"My friend is coming back," she anxiously whispered to the stranger. "Take me away with you and we'll continue talking about waltzes. Now, tomorrow, any time you say. I'll meet you wherever you say. Tell me where. Please hurry, Raoul is here and he'll be furious if he sees me talking to you."

The stranger's eyes suddenly sparkled with a grain of sunshine. "Your friend? Good, madame. The waltz has ended. Perhaps he'll be kind enough to take me downstairs, where my seeing-eye dog waits for me. But before we say goodbye, tell me—what colour are your eyes?"



"It says . . . 'No. 98: Reasonable price for quick sale.'"

A horse race is one thing, but can you fix a courtship?

LONG SHOT

BY DON STANFORD

GAMBLING is a real big thing here, because love is for the very lucky very few, but a sporting flutter is for any guy who is making a lot of money and has absolutely nothing to spend it on. And what do we gamble on?

Love, that's what.

There are about fifty secretaries here at any given time. They call themselves, with engaging candour, The Husband Hunters; *we* call them, with unchivalrous accuracy, The Beasts. Nobody is joking. There is just one reason for a single girl to sign a contract letting herself in for two years' imprisonment in a bleak barricaded company town in the scorching middle of the Arabian desert, and it isn't the high salary.

It's just that the word has got to her that there are some two thousand young, healthy, unmarried men here, too—every man earning top money and not spending a penny of it. The company pays everything for you while you're here, even your income tax, and banks your dough, untouched, for you to pick up when you come home. This is the big inducement, of course. A guy who is young and tough will figure that he can stand living in Hell for two years to get that kind of a start in life—just how many young engineers manage to save up forty thousand dollars *net* in their first two years out of college?

And how many girls get two solid years in which to pick a strong young husband, complete with hair, teeth, muscles,

and forty thou, out of a herd where the numerical ratio runs forty to one in her favour?

The girls have no competition of any kind, you understand. The company makes the town as comfortable as possible, with air-conditioning and movies and libraries and clubs for our leisure hours, but it is still—well, a prison. We do not leave it, except with the drilling rigs and the pipes, because there is nothing for us outside: this is a Moslem country with a stern puritanical king, and the penalty for importing alcoholic beverages into the country, or trying to speak to one of the malodorous veiled women infrequently seen in the streets of the native city is—death. No trial, or any of that modern jazz; all the Arabs in the vicinity simply fall upon the infidel with knives, and the king's justice is done.

So, for the two years of the contract, our social life is somewhat limited. We can read. We can see a movie each night. We can bowl, in our air-conditioned club. We can drink—no alcoholic beverages can be *imported*, but you would be downright astonished at what our research chemists can synthesise for us. We can compete, with sometimes lethal ferocity, for the affections of one of the fifty females who queen it over the two thousand of us; the price of success is instant matrimony, but we are desperate men.

Or we can gamble. We have *pari-mutuel* betting on every one of the fifty girls and there is nothing taken off the top of the pool for the organisers, either. When an engagement is announced, and a girl withdrawn from competition, all the money that has been bet on her losing suitors to get her, is shared out among the holders of tickets on the winning guy. Generally, of course, as the competition narrows down, quite a lot of dough is laid on the front runners by guys who are trying to cover themselves, so the best you are likely to win is three or four to one. But the payoff on Jody O'Day . . .

Jody needn't have come here; she could have had her pick of husbands anywhere. She was little and cute and she sparkled; and she hadn't been here five hours when the big money began to go down. It went mainly on the half-a-dozen guys who were generally considered to be the pick of the bunch—Jim Breen, whose father owned most of the company, and Baxter Hughes, who was in the New York social register, and Mitch Coventry, who had acted in a movie with Leslie Caron, and a few other outstanding types. Because it was clear right away that while Jody was husband-hunting, all

right, she was going to pick and choose—and it would be a lucky guy who got her.

Well, everybody got his money up, even the few guys who generally didn't bet and even most of the girls, who almost never did. The *pari-mutuel* bulletin is posted up every day in the club, and there was over forty thousand dollars down in Jody's pool before the race was started.

Then, a couple of weeks later, Jim Breen's old man flew in on an unscheduled visit, and he and Jim and Jody had dinner together and nearly seventy thousand dollars went down the next day, all of it presumably on Jim.

But within a week there was an airmailed society page on the noticeboard in which Cholly Knickerbocker stated flatly that The Event of the June marriage-season would be the wedding of Bax Hughes III to a Miss Jody O'Day, and the *pari-mutuel* pool brimmed over two hundred thousand dollars for the first time in our history. Bax, however, tore Knickerbocker's column off the noticeboard, and Jody continued to play her field with effervescent enjoyment and no visible preference.

And then Mitch Coventry got a registered and heavily-insured small parcel from Cartier's, and his ears turned crimson when it was handed to him, and the *pari-mutuel* stakes soared over the quarter-million mark. This, of course, is only about a hundred bucks a head for the lot of us; still, it is a lot of money to bet, even on an absolutely honest sporting-event that cannot possibly be fixed. A horse race is one thing, but can you fix a courtship so that a rank outsider will romp home paying a thousand to one? Can you?

I had twenty bucks on myself in the beginning—an optimistic sporting gesture a lot of the guys used to practise themselves; then, as the field thinned out, I put two hundred down on Jim Breen—still one of the front-running favourites—but I figured to pay at least three or four to one the way the money was showering down. My room-mate, Shy Sam Knox, had a hundred on Jim Breen, too, but he did not make the gesture of betting on himself. This is because the only female Shy Sam has ever been able to speak to without cracking his knuckles and choking on his Adam's-apple is Marge Tuttle, who runs the secretarial pool. Marge is fifty-five years old and grey as your grandmother and averages only five or six proposals a week; and she loves Shy Sam as a devoted mother would, and sews on his buttons and roots for him do something hopeless—like get married to a real winner.

So it happened suddenly. No warning; it was like Silky Sullivan, loafing along fifty lengths behind the field and then —*wham*, a winner!

It is a night like any other night; the club is pretty full but the movie is still on, so there is space at the bar. Jody O'Day is bowling, paired with Bax Hughes against Jim Breen and Mitch Coventry; twenty or thirty guys are watching her, drooling a little.

Jody is having fun, as always; she looks as though there is nothing in the world she would rather be doing at this moment.

And then in walks Shy Sam Knox, all six-feet-six of him, minus his self-effacing slouch and walking tall and straight. Right up to the players he walks, shouldering Bax aside as though he is not there at all, and takes the bowl out of Jody's hand and sets it gently in the rack, and Jody looks up at him in surprise.

And Shy Sam's face is—*exalted*. You never saw such a radiance of love and revelation and assurance shining out of a man.

He puts out a hand, and Jody takes it as though she is in a daze, and Shy Sam says, soft and deep and easy without a trace of a stammer, "The stars are out. You want to take a little walk?"

And out they go, leaving a silence as vast as the desert. I know those are the first words Shy Sam ever spoke to Jody, and everybody knows, just from the look of the two of them, that Jody O'Day's race is run.

I passed the *pari-mutuel* bulletin as I went to our room and, sure enough, one single fifty-dollar ticket had been bought on Shy Sam Knox that day, before the betting window closed at six o'clock. And I went on up to the room and found the source of Shy Sam's transcendent inspiration lying open on his desk.

It was a secretary's shorthand notebook, with JODY O'DAY rubber-stamped on the cover and two whole pages inside on which had been written over and over, in a careful, flowing hand: *Josephine Knox. Mrs. Sam Knox. Mrs. Samuel George Knox. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel George Knox invite you . . . Sam and Jody Knox. The Knoxes. Jody Knox. Jody O'Day Knox. Josephine O'Day Knox. Jody and Sam. Sam, Sam, Sam. Jody and Sam Knox. Mr. and Mrs. Sam Knox* . . . And so on, for two entire pages. Two pages of lovesick doodling,

you would say, the kind of day-dreaming avowal of love that would fill the shyest man in the world to bursting with self-assurance. And had.

I burnt the notebook.

I knew Shy Sam would raise hell when he couldn't find it, because it was obvious he would want to keep it under his pillow for ever, as the most cherished sentimental souvenir of his life.

On the other hand, once he dismounted from his soaring cloud of euphoria and took one more fond look at the source of his courage, he could hardly fail to recognise Marge Tuttle's handwriting.

By fixing Love's little race to the vast benefit of all concerned, it seemed to me that Marge had earned her quarter-million-dollar payoff from that fifty-dollar ticket on Shy Sam. Also, of course, now that I knew Love *could* be fixed and how it might be done, it occurred to me that if I quietly bided my time the chance might come again . . .

© Don Stanford 1966

" Cake for the love of Allah . . .
It's my birthday—"

CONCLUDING ARGOSY'S THRILLER SERIAL

A LIFE TO LOSE

BY LAWRENCE HAMMOND

THOMAS WEBB, an Englishman living in France after the killing of his wife by the OAS terrorist organisation, meets Corsican racketeer, **MAX GENOVESE,** and his henchman, **CHIN-CHIN.** Max believes a fortune of a million francs has been hidden by the OAS in Corsica near the village of Christiu, and he orders a petty crook, **JEAN-LOUIS CALVORESI,** to return to Corsica to pinpoint the money. For fear of a double-cross, Max hires Webb to tail Jean-Louis, but gives the Englishman a false story which does not reveal the existence of the money. Webb develops a sympathy for Jean-Louis, who is obsessed with the cowardice which had driven him to flee from the island years earlier to escape a vendetta in which his brother, **MARC,** was killed. Now, Jean-Louis again meets his brother's killer, **MATTEO;** again he flees and, by accident, Jean-Louis' twelve-year-old brother is shot dead. Jean-Louis realises that he must face the vendetta—kill Matteo or be killed. Webb, meanwhile, has become involved with an enigmatic Corsican girl, **MARIANE.** Disgusted with the killings, Webb quits his job. Max and Chin-Chin pursue him to Corsica, convinced he has found the money. When Webb denies this, Max seizes Mariane . . .

WEBB could see a little better now, but the hurt was still in his head. He could not think clearly, and through the pain came deep waves of panic. "Don't be stupid," he said to Genovese. "I told you I knew nothing of your money, and that is true. Even if I did, I wouldn't touch OAS money. And as for the girl—she's never heard of any money until now. She's just a waitress I picked up."

"I don't believe you," said Genovese.

"I don't know anything! I swear it."

Genovese sighed. "Look at it from my point of view. I have good reason to believe there is the best part of a million francs tucked away in or near this village. I send two little tame birds to scout around for me on what they think is a perfectly innocent mission. They spend a few days here, where

DRAWING
BY
ROBB

the money is, and then one little bird flies away and the other little bird, nesting with a girl-friend and thinking in his stupid English way that I'm far off in Marseilles, quits. Well, Mr. Webb, I ask you."

Webb was trying to play for time, hoping the café-owner would return, a customer pass by; trying to think of a lie that would stand up to investigation; but his brain was still jumping and flinching from the pain. "All I can say again is that I know nothing of any money. If it's here, you take it: I'm not interested. But I don't have it, and I know Jean-Louis doesn't."

"If you still say the same when I've finished with you and the girl, I might believe you. I just wanted you to understand my point of view. I don't go in for unnecessary violence—but business is business."

Genovese nodded at the Arab. "All right, let's get them in the car before this place wakes up. We'll find some nice quiet spot in the woods, eh? Shouldn't be difficult. Might see some good timber land on the way."

"Wait! There's one thing you should know."

Mariane's voice came as a surprise to the men, who had been talking as if she were not there.

"It won't do any good, Fat One," she went on. "You know what happened to his wife, I suppose, and you think he'll talk rather than see the same thing happen to me."

"That's the general idea," said Genovese.

"Well it won't work," she said. "I don't know if he has anything to tell you or not. But even if he has, it won't work. I've had my fill of men ever since I was 14 years of age. And there's nothing, nothing, that you and your coffee-coloured sidekick can do to me that's worse than what I already know."

"Mariane, please," Webb interrupted. "Don't. They won't do anything. I promise."

"Don't worry," she said gently. "You have done much for me. I can give a little for you."

Genovese rose and put his hand, still holding the gun, in a pocket. "This is all very touching," he said, "but I think we'll resume our little meeting down the road with some privacy."

As they moved towards the car, Webb was wondering how he could make a break for it without leaving the girl.

He said to her in a voice that was not too low to be overheard. "I've decided to tell what I know."

They were getting in the car, and Genovese looked slyly at him and chuckled. "You do amuse me, English. And I suppose that now you think you'll tell me some little bedtime story

and we'll all go home. Mr. Webb, I am an expert on other people's information. You'll tell me what you know, all right —but after I've prescribed a little treatment for the girl-friend. That way, I think, you're more likely to pick a bedtime story that has some truth in it."

In a small clearing in the woods, five or six kilometres beyond Christiu, Chin-Chin held the girl and looked at Genovese, Genovese looked at Webb, and Webb looked at Genovese's automatic.

"Well, this needn't take long," Genovese said briskly. "Down you get, Mr. Webb. That's right, back against the tree —make yourself comfortable. Hands on your head, I think. Stretch out your legs—right out, so. If you make one move, just one, I'll blow off your right kneecap for a start. All right? And I don't want to hear from you. I'm not interested in anything you have to say at this moment. I'll tell you when to talk —when I have you in the right frame of mind."

The whole thing was so efficient and businesslike—it resembled a rehearsal for an unlikely play, with the producer quietly assigning their roles and movements to the cast. It wasn't possible; it wasn't true; it was ridiculous; it was a clinical nightmare. But it was happening.

Genovese nodded towards a fallen log. "That'll do," he said to Chin-Chin. "Tie her."

Her hands were tied behind her back. She had been forced to sit astride the log. Chin-Chin swiftly tied a thin nylon cord round one ankle, ran it round a stub of projecting branch, and was knotting it around the other ankle. The girl looked utterly blank. She did not struggle, she did not speak; her muscles were slack, and she sat like a vegetable. Fear? Despair? A self-willed, drugging apathy? Webb did not know. The Arab put a hand on her chest and gently pushed, and she toppled backwards, her weight on her own bound wrists, unable to rise.

"What shall I use?" the Arab asked.

"Oh, heaven help me!" Genovese exclaimed. "Can't you use a little initiative? Do I have to decide everything?"

His air of efficient detachment was slipping; the excitement was beginning to show. He licked his fat lips and moved his fat knees. "You've got a knife, haven't you? Well get on with it."

It's now, Webb thought. It has to be now. You think, and think again, and can see no answer, and you know you have to act instead of think, whatever may result, because anything

is better than letting this happen, and you've at last reached the nightmare stage that exorcises all nightmares, when the known is worse than the unknown . . .

The Arab clicked open his knife and gave a last questioning glance at Genovese. The big man did not see it: he was smiling down at Webb.

Don't look at him, because he'll see it in your eyes, and know. Look at the Arab, and Genovese's legs, not his gun; his legs are just at the side of your vision. Surely he's bound to turn his head when the Arab starts—he won't want to miss that. Just one little movement . . .

The Arab shrugged. He took two paces which brought him close to Mariane. He looked down at her for an instant, and changed his grip on the knife.

Suddenly there was the *crack* of an explosion, and one side of the Arab's face was a red and white mess. He seemed to leap through the air sideways, found his balance at an angle, and staggered six, seven paces. Then he fell, making a bubbling, choking noise.

It had happened very quickly, and the three who lived and watched were frozen. Webb recovered first because he had already been coiled for action. He drew up his feet and lunged for Genovese's gun hand, twisting his body away from the line of fire as he rose. The gun came away with surprising ease, before Genovese had moved his startled eyes from the Arab.

Webb stepped quickly behind Genovese and jabbed the automatic hard against his spine. His back was protected by a tree, his front by the fat man, and somehow he had to get across the clearing, fast, to Mariane, before another shot came . . . From where? From whom?

He began to scan the edges of the clearing, and suddenly a voice came: not a voice, a cackle: "Did I get him, corporal?"

"You got him, friend," Webb shouted, trying to locate the source of the voice.

"Do you have the others disarmed?"

"Yes, friend."

There was a stirring in the fern, and Webb tightened his grip on the automatic. "You get it first," he said to Genovese.

A long black gun-barrel slid into view, stopped, wavered, and then it emerged in the hand of its owner, half-bent, chuckling diabolically, skipping with glee—the very old, very mad ex-soldier of Verdun whom Jean-Louis had befriended and whom Webb had never met.

He hopped up and down beside the dead Arab and gloated:

"Ho, that got him in one, eh? Damn Boches. Trying to torture a Frenchwoman. That showed him, eh?"

Webb jolted Genovese forward, and himself moved warily. "You did well, old man," he said.

"That another?" The old idiot looked with hostility at Genovese.

"That's another," Webb answered. "That's why I've got him covered."

With breathtaking speed the old man jabbed the muzzle of his single-barrelled gun into Genovese's stomach and pressed the trigger. There was an empty click and Genovese tried to step back, but was brought up by the automatic in his spine.

Before Webb could speak, the old man threw down his gun, pounced on the dead Arab's knife and scuttled towards Genovese, blade first. Genovese squealed and Webb said sharply: "Wait! We'll have this one alive."

The old man faltered. "Taking prisoners? No—we don't take prisoners at Verdun. Damn Boches. Slaughter 'em, that's best." Then he brightened. "Unless he has information? Is that it?"

"Yes," Webb agreed gravely. "We'll keep him alive. Unless he tries to get away. Then we kill him—quick. Cover him with that knife while I free the girl."

The old man pricked Genovese's stomach with the knife and muttered: "Ho, I'll make you talk, you damn Boche."

Genovese sweated. Webb found his pocket knife and cut the cord that bound Mariane. "I don't understand," she said.

"No more do I. But it's all right. You'll be all right."

"I thought you were all Boches," the old man called over his shoulder. "So I stalked you, see? Just thinking about the password when I saw that brown one with the girl. Just the sort of thing the Boches would do, use an African to torture a Frenchwoman. Anyway, I got him in one. Mustn't waste ammunition."

Suddenly the old man's voice changed. "So you've come, Alphonse," it said. "About time, too. I got the Boche all right."

Webb whirled round and saw another elderly man run into the clearing, out of breath and wringing his hands. "Oh, dear God," the newcomer panted. "It's happened. He's shot someone. Oh, dear God and all the saints, it's happened. I'm so sorry . . ."

"Don't worry," said Webb. "He saved our lives."

Alphonse hardly appeared to hear. "Oh, sweet heaven, where did he get the ammunition from? He must have stolen a cartridge, and all these years I thought the gun wasn't loaded. I shudder to think the times it could have happened. Oh, monsieur, what can I say?"

A pair of lunatics, Webb thought. And thank God for them.

The madman, sticking Genovese with the point of the knife, snorted. "My brother," he said to Webb. "Don't take any notice of him. He's soft—getting old. If it was left to the likes of him we'd lose the war."

Webb shook his head. Now that the tension was ebbing, his eyes were throbbing again and the whole thing seemed like a farce.

"What happens now?" Alphonse asked despairingly.

"There's only one thing," said Webb wearily, "and it should have happened long ago if only I'd known what the hell was going on. It's time someone got in the police. Let them sort it out."

THEY made their way down towards the road in single file, Genovese first, then Webb with the automatic in his right hand, and then Mariane. The two old men had scuttled back to their shack, there to dream and mutter and wait for the police.

Genovese stopped. "Look," he said. "We must talk."

Webb jammed the gun hard against his back and said: "Do that again, and I'll shoot you."

"But let's be sensible," Genovese began, and Webb fired a shot which raised the dust inches from his feet. They walked on, and Genovese said over his shoulder: "I am a rich man. I would pay you well to forget this whole misunderstanding. Why involve the police?"

"Shut up."

"Perhaps you don't realise, my friend—there is simply no point. I have friends in the police."

"In that case, what are you worrying about?"

"Just this. I want that money. Once the police know about it, I won't have it, you won't have it—nobody will have it. Except the State. What good will that do anyone? I've made a considerable investment in this: I'm entitled to a return. So are you."

They could see the car now, a hundred feet below them. Webb halted, faced Genovese, and said: "Do you really think, after what you were going to do to this girl, that I could do a

deal with you? Why don't you just save your breath."

Genovese spread his hands, reasonableness personified. "But Mr. Webb, that was only bluff. Distasteful, perhaps, but this is business, and sometimes a businessman has to do things which are distasteful, but necessary. I told you once before—I am a philosopher, and so should you be. Anyway, what is all this about the girl? She's only a whore, isn't she?"

Even as he moved, Webb knew that he was a fool to rise to the bait—but it was too late, then. He swung the gun towards Genovese's head. The big man was ready, and took an easy, timed pace to one side. Webb missed him, and stumbled on the slope and began to roll. He heard Mariane cry out, and dug in his heels to brake himself, and realised that he still held the gun, and prepared to fight off Genovese. But there was no assault.

"The car!" Mariane yelled.

Webb clambered to his feet in time to see Genovese jump from the last rock and slam the car door behind him. As Webb fired, he knew it was hopeless. In moments, the Citroën was out of sight round the nearest of all the hundreds of hairpin bends that torment the mountain roads of the island.

THEY walked back to the café and Webb phoned the police in Corte, the ancient fortress-city which had once been the capital and which lay in a bowl among the mountain peaks in the centre of the island. He merely announced that a man had been shot, that he knew the whereabouts of the culprit, and would they come at once, please. They did not sound very excited.

Ignoring the inquisitive café owner, Webb and Mariane crossed the road and sat on the wall opposite the café, and waited. They were silent, both more than a little stunned by the events of the day, and Webb wondering vaguely how much he should tell the police. Then, with some relief, he recognised the small Renault which turned the bend below them and he muttered: "Jean-Louis. That's one problem the fewer."

Jean-Louis looked like a man who has not slept for a week. His thin face was strained; his eyes sunken. "I am sorry I was so long," he said as he joined them. "I went to the funeral of my brother. I found where Matteo will be. Now I am going to Vannina. I will find Matteo with the Penitent."

"The what?"

"The Penitent." He nodded at Mariane. "She's Corsican. She'll explain."

"And what do you think you'll do when you meet Matteo?" Webb asked.

"You know. You heard. When next we meet, one of us will die, and that will be the end of the vendetta. All I know is that I must atone for my brother."

"There's just one thing," Webb said. "Genovese's here."

This brought no life, not even fear, to Jean-Louis' face. "So long as he does not keep me from what I have to do. After that, I don't care. But you, my friend, you must be careful. Don't tell him you know anything about any money."

Webb smiled grimly. "It's too late. Genovese has already called on us and we had a little . . . discussion . . . about the money. His Arab boy-friend got himself shot."

"And Genovese?"

"I don't know. He hopped off. He's in a green Citroën ID, if you see one coming. I've told the police—waiting for them now."

For the first time Jean-Louis showed a reaction. "They must not find me . . . keep me from what I must do. Just give me a day, two days. After that I shall give myself up to the police. If I live."

He looked from one to the other, and Webb suddenly burst out: "Jean-Louis, I'm sick and tired of death and violence. I've had my fill. Look—you keep preaching at me about atonement. Hasn't it occurred to you that you might atone for your brother's death by *living*, and doing something with your life, instead of getting your head blown off for him?"

Jean-Louis stared at him and said, simply: "Please," and Webb really was tired of it all, and said harshly: "Well, if you're going, you'd better go now. The police should be here soon."

Jean-Louis flinched at Webb's tone, and turned and hurried over to the little Renault. He paused at the door, moved an arm as if to wave, then changed his mind. The door shut and the car chugged off up the hill.

"I *am* sick of it, too," Webb said to Mariane, staring into space. "I suppose we ought to keep him out of whatever we tell the police?"

"It is better."

"And when we're through with that, I'd better get up to—where is it?—Vannina—and try and keep some sort of an eye on him." He gave a half-smile. "Though God knows, I'm not very good at protecting people . . . I'm sorry about today."

"Don't be. It has done something for us both."

"Nearly killed us!"

"No." She spoke seriously. "For you, it has made you advise someone to live, instead of die—and I do not think you would have troubled to do that, once."

"And for you?"

She stared at her hands. "For me . . . it gave me the chance to know that someone else was more important to me than I myself am; to know that I would suffer for him."

"Please don't say that."

"It is true. Perhaps that would have been my atonement . . . Like Jean-Louis . . . We are all atoning for something."

Very gently, he said: "I do not want you to atone. Just . . ."

"What?"

"Just . . . to be."

THE police arrived in one of the old-type black Citroëns. There were three men. The one in uniform never left the wheel of the car. The other two were in civilian clothes. The elder and senior, who introduced himself as Monsieur Cargese, was a brisk, dapper little man of about 50 with rimless glasses and very little thin grey hair, heavily greased, which was spread out and pressed down rather inadequately over the bald areas of his scalp.

His companion looked about 25—very dark, very handsome and very sharply dressed; like a pop singer who has been introduced to an Italian tailor. He said nothing and could not keep his eyes off Mariane.

While Webb talked, he wandered into the bar and came back with four bottles of beer. Then he tilted back his chair, picked his teeth, and studied Mariane's legs.

Webb tried to keep it short. He said he had been engaged by a stranger named Genovese in Marseilles to come to Corsica on an apparently harmless inquiry about possible holiday camp sites. He had found the work tedious, and resigned. To his amazement, Genovese had come over to the island, started talking about a lot of hidden OAS money which he accused Webb of stealing, and had been about to beat up Webb and the girl when the old idiot had intervened and saved their lives by shooting the Arab. Genovese had escaped. The Arab's killer was in his shack with his brother, and please don't be too hard on them.

That was about all.

When Webb came to the end, there was silence but for a low

whistling noise which was made by the younger policeman, who was now studying the soft hairs on the back of Mariane's neck and blowing gently into the top of his beer bottle. Cargese had not changed his tight little expression by a fraction. Now he said, as if it were an accusation: "And so you found it necessary to make a complaint, Mr. Webb."

"Not a complaint. I thought the police should be informed."

"Complaint . . . informed . . . You have got us involved anyway. And now we shall have to go through the motions of trying to catch that Genovese."

"But a man has been killed."

"A cheap Marseilles gangster whom nobody will miss and who should have been killed many times over, many years ago. Don't talk to me about 'a man has been killed,' please."

Cargese was addressing Webb as if he were an out of work immigrant labourer applying for sickness benefit on a busy day at the relief office. He was brisk and bureaucratic and didn't like being bothered. His companion was leaning forward and staring into one of Mariane's ears; and still whistling softly into the neck of the bottle as though it were the ear itself. The combination was very trying to Webb's temper, but he struggled for control.

"Also," he said, as reasonably as he could, "the girl and I nearly got ourselves killed, too."

Cargese stared at him. "Mr. Webb, the inference would appear to be that you make a habit of interfering."

"Now look . . ."

"Please." Cargese held up a small white hand. "How long have you been on this island? I already know. Less than a week. Long enough, Mr. Webb, to know that this place is two islands. There is the new Corsica that the tourists know—the beaches, and the shops, and the hotels and the holiday camps. Very lovely, Mr. Webb—a pity you did not stick to it. There we should be delighted to hear from you with any complaint you might care to make about the difficulties of parking your car. But here, up in the mountains, this is the real Corsica, the old Corsica. These are the people who fought the Romans and the Moors and the Barbary pirates and the Genoese and the Germans and Italians . . . who learned to deal with their oppressors in their own way over the centuries. It is neither necessary nor good for there to be too much interference—so long as the tourists are not concerned. Do you understand?"

Webb did—a little—and he said: "Yes. But I thought the police should know."

"You would be surprised at what we know, Mr. Webb. We know, for instance, about your friend Jean-Louis Calvoresi who came here with you. But that is beside the point. I just wanted you to understand that in these mountains things are sometimes best left to themselves; and if too much is not 'known,' justice is apt to get done."

"There's just one thing," said Webb, a trifle contritely. "Surely I was right to inform you that an obvious criminal like Genovese was on the island?"

Cargese sighed again. "We knew where and when and how Genovese came here. We had a reasonable guess at why."

"But . . ."

"We just did not think it necessary to do anything about it at that time, that is all."

Webb said: "Well anyway, I should have thought somebody ought to be informed if there's a million francs of OAS money lying around."

"Ah, the money," said Cargese, without surprise. "Yes, that is different. That we will get after. And meantime, where can we find you, Mr. Webb? You may be needed for further statements. You and the girl."

He nodded briefly at Mariane and added: "She supports everything you say, of course."

"Of course. I thought of going into Vannina tomorrow, to see this Easter procession."

"Ah, Le Catenacciu, the Penitent. I am pleased, Mr. Webb. That is part of the real Corsica that I was talking of, the old Corsica. You may understand these things a little better when you have had that experience."

"Well, I thought I'd go anyway. That is, if nobody objects."

"No, no," said Cargese. "That, then, is where Max Genovese will be. He still thinks you know where this money is, he still thinks you are the quickest way to it. Therefore, he still wants you, Mr. Webb. If you are in Vannina, that's where Genovese will be."

"But he doesn't know I'm going," said Webb.

"No? Well perhaps he will hear. Word may spread. You'd be surprised how quickly gossip spreads in a small community like this, especially about strangers."

"You mean—you'll see that word is spread," said Webb slowly.

Cargese smiled, like a bald, bespectacled buzzard. "After all, it was you who called in the police, Mr. Webb. It's your fault that we have to go after this Genovese now. So—where

you will be, he will be, which makes our task a little easier. So—perhaps word will spread."

He got up to leave. His companion reluctantly put down his musical beer bottle and dragged his eyes away from Mariane's bosom, then stood back politely so that she could precede him and he could watch. "Tell me," Webb asked Cargese as they walked to the car, "what's your friend's job?"

"Oh, he takes notes," Cargese said.

"I didn't see him writing."

"Ah, but he has a photographic memory," the little policeman answered, and either the sun caught his glasses or there was the ghost of a smile in his eyes.

As the car started, Cargese put his head out of the window and said: "So it looks, Mr. Webb, as though everyone will meet in Vannina. *Au 'voir.*"

"You know what it means, don't you," Mariane said to Webb as the sound of the engine died away. "They are using you as bait for Genovese."

"I know."

"Then don't go. Please don't go."

He took her arm. "I promised myself I'd try to stop Jean-Louis doing anything too damn-stupid. Remember?"

"In that case, I come with you."

He smiled and did not argue. "Of course," he said. "And now you'd better tell me what goes on in Vannina, what the hell this Cat . . . Catenacciu stuff is all about. Sounds to me a bit like a sort of carnival in reverse."

"It is not funny," she answered. "I was there once before. It is the most frightening thing I have ever seen."

NOTES from a guidebook:—

Vannina: Pop., 5,000. See, on the tree-shaded central square, the Church. Behind the Church, the Old Town, very picturesque. At a distance of five kilometres, prehistoric stone circles. Festivals, etc.: On the evening of Good Friday, Procession of Le Catenacciu . . .

"I would not say that 'festival' is the most appropriate word, gentlemen," the priest said with a quiet smile.

He was a crop-haired, muscular man in his black cassock, seated at a desk in his small room behind the church. Before him, on wooden chairs, sat three journalists—an American travel writer, a young French magazine reporter-photographer

with cameras hanging all over him, and an earnest German feature-writer.

The priest was tolerantly amused at their interest in what was to him a fixed and unchanging part of the year's cycle in his parish, and he said again: "No, not 'festival.' I prefer to think of Le Catenacciu—the Penitent, you would say in English—as a 'mystery,' in the medieval sense."

He rose, took a key from his pocket, unlocked a cupboard high in the wall behind him, plunged in a hand, and turned to face them again, holding up a small notebook. "There, gentlemen," he said, "there is the secret of the Catenacciu. On the yellowing pages of this notebook are written the names of all the men who have taken the role of the Penitent since I have been in this parish."

"No women?" the French reporter asked casually.

"No women," said the priest. "The Penitent is always a man. And no eyes but mine ever see this book, and know the names that are in it. When I leave this parish I shall destroy this notebook, and all its secrets, as my predecessor destroyed his before me."

"But why so much secrecy?" The American was persistent.

The priest answered him seriously. "To know that, you must understand this very old tradition. Le Catenacciu—I'm sorry: the Penitent—is a man who has grievously sinned, a human being in misery because of his evil ways, a poor soul who seeks spiritual peace. To achieve this, he is willing to be purged of his sins by living again, in the innermost depths of his being and in the agony of his body, the sufferings of Christ, Who sacrificed Himself to save mankind. For a man willingly to endure the agony of Christ, to volunteer to submit his body to the torments of his Calvary—for this, a man must have sinned much. And that, gentlemen, is why the identity of the Penitent is never revealed."

"Some say—" the American again—"that the Penitent has often been a famous man . . . that statesmen, big lawyers, well-known artists, reformed gangsters, have taken the Penitent's role in the procession."

The priest shook his head. "I will help you all I can, but there are some questions I cannot answer. Obviously, *everyone* wants to know who the Penitent is . . . of what crimes he is asking pardon . . . for of this you can be sure: only he who carries the burden of the gravest sin can wear the Penitent's robes. I have known the crowd prick the Penitent with their knives, even try to set fire to his robe—do anything to increase

his torment, in the hope that he will weaken enough to cry out, to tear off his hood, make some sound or gesture that will give himself away."

"And has that never happened?"

"Never."

"It's a bit barbaric, isn't it?"

"It is a man shriving his wickedness and purifying his soul. The Penitent volunteers for this ordeal: it is what he wants."

The journalists were impressed by his sincerity, and the German asked, without cynicism: "Is there ever a shortage of volunteers?"

The priest was locking away the notebook again. "In this book," he said, "are already written the names of men who have begged for the role of Penitent for ten years ahead."

"Isn't it true—I've heard, anyway—that the crowd gets pretty wild? Kind of unloading its own sins on to the Penitent, and punishing him for them?"

The priest looked pointedly at his watch. "I must leave you in a few minutes, gentlemen. I have to collect this year's Penitent."

"Won't he be seen?"

"We meet at a secret place. He will already be wearing his robes and hood. I shall bring him back by car, to the small door at the rear of the church. He will not be recognised—we have had much practice at this, after all."

The square was already filled with a swirling mass of people. Probably half of them were tourists. They were the ones who wore bright clothes, who moved about restlessly, who chatted cheerfully, and laughed easily. The Corsicans were the black suits and black dresses; the sombre faces and the low voices. They were the stillness and the charged, murmurous tension.

They were waiting, and they knew for what they waited, and their need for release was mounting.

The sun was a red ball already partly hidden by the tall bell-tower of the church, and the shadows cast by the trees were soft and elongated. "It will not be long now," someone said. "It will soon be dark."

"Hey, tourist! I'll tell you a story about that."

A short, square, elderly Corsican nudged the American journalist. "You know the procession always takes place in the dark, yes? And then the candles are lit—thousands of them. Well, in the Occupation—the Italians it was, at that time—they said the procession could go on, but it must take

place in daylight, and no candles must be lit to break the black-out. And just to be sure we understood, they set up their machine guns all round the square. Well, the procession started at 5 o'clock, still daylight, you see. But that year, the procession took longer, much longer than ever before. It was not finished when darkness fell. And the Italians warned us again, and pointed their machine guns. And then, suddenly, all the candles were lit. Blackout? Pouf! It was the fire and the light of Le Catenacciu, all over the town, just as always."

He seemed to have finished, and the American, fascinated, prompted him: "What happened?"

"What do you think happened? They fired their machine guns into the crowd, of course, as they said they would."

"But that must have been . . . slaughter."

"They fired their machine guns until the candles were out. But it took more than that to extinguish all of us."

An uncomfortable silence settled on the three strangers, brought together by an accident of their trade to write up the same story; and they stared at the crowd, and each in his own way was stirred by dim pangs of conscience and a faint sense of guilt from some unremembered past as the shadow of the approaching Night of the Penitent began to work on them.

Along the edges of the square, leaning against the trees, stood uniformed policemen. Others, in civilian clothes, drifted through the ever-growing crowd. High in the bell-tower of the church, by a narrow opening overlooking the square, sat little Monsieur Cargese and his casual assistant. "You'd need walkie-talkies, bloodhounds, and a thousand troops, and you'd still be wasting your time," Cargese said irritably.

"So what do we do?" his assistant asked.

"Wait and see what happens. And meanwhile, have supper."

He took from a paper bag half a garlic sausage and a hunk of bread and began to chew. "I do hate irregular meals," he murmured.

The sun could no longer be seen now, but the air itself seemed red in that brief time between day and dusk. The sky was apoplectic, and the atmosphere seemed to throb. Off the square, a narrow street ran up in steps, like a stone staircase, and the granite houses on either side were dappled with the heads of women and children at every window. The granite glowed, and the stone steps too, as if in the glare from an oven.

Webb and Mariane had been trying to push their way up

through the milling people. They were out of breath, and Mariane drew him into a doorway for a moment. "What's the use?" she said. "It is madness."

As soon as Webb had seen the crowds on the very outskirts of the town, he had known it would be useless to try to find Jean-Louis, but he had stubbornly persisted in pushing through, aimlessly, and more and more hopelessly.

"It would be a miracle to find him," Mariane said. "Let us go back, now, before it's dark, before it all starts."

"Look at the crowd," he said. "D'you think we stand a dog's chance of getting through that? No, we'll have to wait till the procession's over. We're stuck."

It was true. The square was now a solid mass of people. Only a small area immediately before the main door of the church was empty, as if invisible barriers kept the people back. It was empty, and waiting.

Immovable, in the front rank of the people on one of the wings of this clearing, stood Matteo. He had come many hours earlier to be at this spot: it was the place where he had stood when he had come to the procession of Le Catenacciu once before, after his son and Marc Calvoresi had been killed. This was the place where the procession started and finished; where, at the end, the priest stood and blessed the crowd; and the people, exhausted and drained by the scourging they had inflicted on the Penitent, sank to their knees, empty, and rose again feeling purged and forgiven.

He stood, hard, and carved, and motionless, and inevitable as the granite.

He was oblivious of the elbows and feet and voices about him.

He waited.

Max Genovese had duly heard, in a bar not far from Christiu, that the Englishman who had thrown the dice for the knife Game, had got himself mixed up in a killing and was going to Le Catenacciu at Vannina. This had left Genovese with only two immediate problems—transport and disguise, since both he and his Citroën were too easily recognisable. He was able to solve both problems simultaneously, and he gave only some of the credit to chance.

A coach had pulled off the road at the side of the bar. Its indicator said *Vannina*, and its load of German tourists had debouched into the café for cool drinks. The driver,

HELP YOURSELF TO WRITING SUCCESS

To be a selling writer, you must increase your understanding of successful writing methods. You need to develop your literary ability by greater knowledge of what to write . . . . and how to write it! These practical books show you the way.

HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL T.V. COMEDY

With this book to guide him, the aspiring T.V. Comedy-writer will quickly go from "Gags to Riches" if he can apply the information in the right way, and it is so clearly given and so full of informative commonsense on the subject that he can scarcely fail to do so. 15s.

WRITING THE ROMANTIC NOVEL

Here is no 'run-of-the-mill' stereotyped formula, but sincere and practical advice from a writer who believes that plots originate in character, and who proves, in a fascinating, easy-to-read book, that a romance need not be 'just another love story'. 15s.

MODERN FICTION WRITING TECHNIQUE

Written by a man who has had over 1,000 acceptances from British and overseas editors—who has published 9 novels—"Modern Fiction-Writing Technique" provides you with the story-writing guidance you must have. 12s. 6d.

WRITING THE SERIAL STORY

Straightforward, this step-by-step guide tells you exactly how to break into the high-paying serial market. You also profit from the many worthwhile tips regarding fiction-writing in general. 10s. 6d.

Bond Street Publishers Ltd.

124 New Bond St., London, W.1

"I have had three more articles printed and another one due for publication next week. Thank you for the great help you have given me." — Mrs. D. A.

WRITE TO SELL!

The above letter is typical of the hundreds received every year from students. Most are from beginners who all agree that, "You never know what you can do until you try!"

The market for freelance articles and stories is greater than ever. Helped by the famous "Know-How" Course, you too can write to sell in your spare time. This fascinating Course shows you the tried, tested methods of professional writers . . . secrets which can bring you writing success.

If you don't sell, there are no tuition fees to pay! Moreover, you benefit from a free subscription to THE WRITER, which tells you regularly what editors are buying. Send for FREE "'Know-How' Guide to Writing Success."

Write now: there is no obligation.

B.A. School of Successful Writing Ltd. (Dept. H.)

124 New Bond Street, London, W.1

WRITER'S HANDBOOKS

Writing for Television	5s. 0d.
The Easy Way to Plot	2s. 6d.
The Business Side of Writing	2s. 6d.
Writing for Children	2s. 6d.
Beginners' Guide to Freelance Journalism	2s. 6d.
Writing Saleable Press Articles	2s. 6d.
Writing for Radio	2s. 6d.
How to Become a Newspaper Reporter	2s. 6d.

These Practical Writing Aids may be obtained at prices shown or at the inclusive price of £1 for all EIGHT

BOND STREET PUBLISHERS LTD.

124 New Bond Street, London, W.1

dressed in a long white overall and a peaked cap, had settled himself on the back seat of the coach, and was reading a book and occasionally swigging from a bottle of wine. He looked up irritably when the bulky figure of Max, an apologetic smile on his face, edged up the centre aisle towards him. The smile was still on Max's face as his podgy hands stretched out and fastened on the driver's throat, thumbs on the windpipe, and pressed until he lost consciousness.

Max stripped him of the white overall and put it on. In all of Corsica he could not have found a garment better suited to his purpose, because he was of a size difficult to fit and to conceal casually; and he silently blessed the coach company for its thoughtful economy in providing an overall that was clearly intended to be handed from one to another of its drivers, whatever their stature. It hung down well below his knees and it covered his stomach and his distinctively expensive suit: it was admirable. The cap sat on his head like a pimple on a pumpkin, and he tucked it under a seat.

Max dragged the driver along the blind side of the coach to the rear, and stuffed him in the boot. There would probably be enough air to keep him alive. Max was not sure, and was not worried.

He settled down in the driver's seat to await the return of his tourists—and to tell them, if necessary, that he was the relief driver and the next stop was Vannina.

All that had been several hours ago; and now his rage against Webb had had time to boil. Webb had become the focus more than Jean-Louis: the latter's defection was not unexpected; the Englishman's was a personal affront, and Genovese savoured a special hate for him.

Perhaps, too, he had caught something of the tension that pulsed in the air at Vannina, as the light slowly faded and the murmuring of the crowd was like a deep grumble of drums.

The fat man in the long white coat edged his way about the square, backwards, forwards, sideways—he did not care in what direction so long as he moved, so long as more faces came into his vision.

In the end, he was sure, one of them would be—must be—Webb's.

The police he could spot through a press of twenty bodies, and all they ever saw of him was the top of a purloined and commonplace beret. His hands were deep in the loose pockets of the overall, both clenched, and one of them clenched on the hilt of a revolver. There was a smile of apology on his

SHORT STORY ARTICLE & TV SCRIPT WRITING

can be learnt by post. Thousands of mss. are bought each week by newspapers, magazines and TV companies, paying from £2 to £750 to Premier School students. Nearly 50 years of successful coaching. If you, too, want to earn money from your pen, then why not write us a letter or send us a short specimen of your writing, and we shall tell you what your chances are free of charge. Or simply write for our free literature, stating which course you are interested in.

THE PREMIER SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

(Est. 1919)

53 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4 (FLE 7159—24 hrs.)

MARRIAGE IN MIND?

Why not consult the experts?

THE ASHLEY MARRIAGE BUREAU

10 Corporation Street, Manchester 4

offers a well established, confidential service

Introductions arranged throughout the country

HEATHER JENNER

MARRIAGE BUREAU

124 New Bond St., W.1

Mayfair 9634

ADVICE BUREAU INCORPORATED

Open weekdays, Thursdays until 8 p.m., lunch hours and Saturday mornings

Yorkshire

Marriage Bureau

established 1955

by Daphne & Ivan Hargrave

Clients all over Britain

4 Pavilion Terrace, Scarborough

WRITERS!

If you are not selling your MSS we would like to hear from you. Free criticism and market advice on all kinds of literary work is available to Penman Club members the world over. The cost of membership is less than 5d. per week! Write today for free prospectus (no obligation) to—

Dept. A 1, The Penman Club, Penman House 70a London Road, Southend-on-Sea, Essex

face as he trod on a toe, or squeezed between two stomachs; but, behind the smile, a thin voice was saying inside his brain: "Damn his eyes, I'll find him, I'll find him. He's here somewhere and I'll find him."

When he found him, Webb would talk, or die. Or both. Max Genovese was tired of waiting.

Already the shadows had merged into one deep shade at the back of the church, where, beneath the dark trees, the dark little door stood open awaiting the return of the priest with the Penitent. There were no spectators here; even if the police had not kept them away, the unwritten law of custom would have forbidden any Corsican to approach.

The lights of a car jogged through the gloom. The vehicle, square and elderly, chugged up very close to the door. The priest killed the engine and got out. He glanced round and was satisfied. He opened the passenger door and a bent figure, covered with a ground-length red robe, his head smothered by a hood of the same colour, emerged. Eyes darted like a snake's tongue behind the slits in the hood as priest and Penitent, the black robe and the blood-red, slipped through the small door of the church and closed it behind them.

"Listen." The priest held up a hand for a moment, and they paused in the darkness. Through the thick walls of the church came a muttering and a mumbling which swelled into a sound like the baying of a vast pack of hounds.

It was the voice of the crowd as the first of the fever began to infect them.

"The lookouts saw the car coming up the hill," the priest said. "They know you are here. They are ready."

He walked over and switched on the light and turned and stared at the figure before him. It was still bent, as it had been when getting out of the car; as if the terrible load which waited outside was already on its shoulders. The coarse robe, all-enveloping, was that of a monk, dyed. The hood, attached to it, was like that of a medieval executioner.

There is always something frightening about a hooded figure and, as the priest watched and waited, he felt a touch of fear as well as pity. The noise from outside was a constant background, oppressing their small room. "Are you ready then, my son?" the priest asked gently.

No voice answered, but the hood nodded: the whole body seemed to nod in agonised affirmation.

Two lengths of heavy chain were on the floor. The priest

HOW TO RELAX

n your garden *with a clear conscience and an appreciative ve that will rove proudly over your loveliest floral display ever.*

The method is simple: do your gardening the labour-saving ay—that is step by step, no hurry, completing each job according the season. The next few weeks can be critical ones. The ccess of your garden this summer will depend on you, on your thusiasm, above all on your "know-how" this spring.

You get the complete know-how from **Popular Gardening,** *ritain's Brightest and Best Gardening weekly. For only eight-ence a week, you can read what the whole team of "PG" experts ave to say on all aspects of your gardening.*

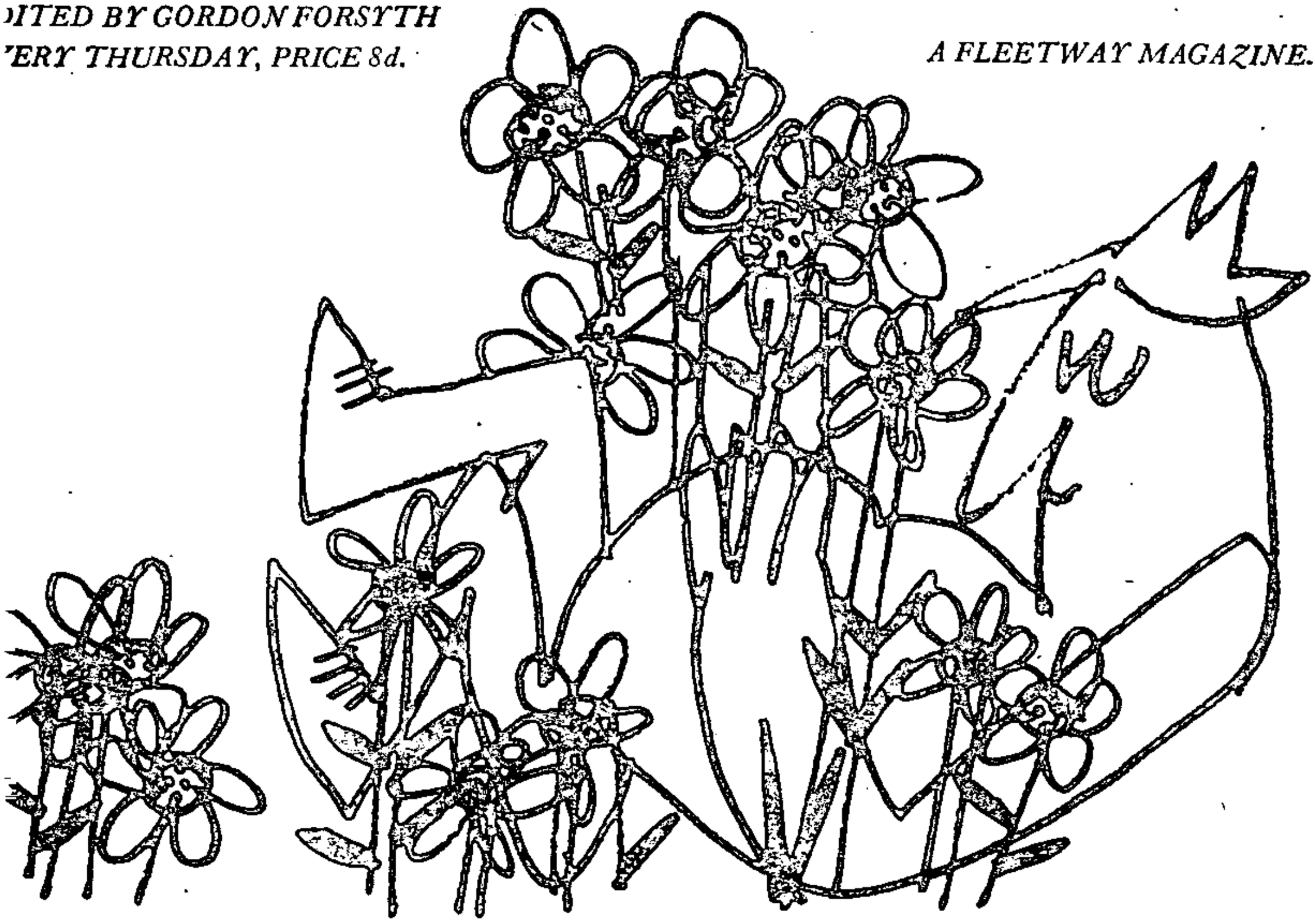
So if you want your friends to see you relaxing this summer, lace a regular order for "PG". Every newsagent can get it for ou. And soon you'll be on the popular road to gardening success ith . . .

POPULAR GARDENING

sue dated March 12th—"Grand Spring Planting" Number
sue dated March 19th—"Grand Spring Sowing" Number
sue dated March 26th—Hardy Flowers for Spring Planting
sue dated April 2nd—"Grand Easter Gardening" Number

ITED BY GORDON FORSYTH
'ERY THURSDAY, PRICE 8d.

A FLEETWAY MAGAZINE.



knelt at the Penitent's bare feet and began to shackle the first chain round one ankle. The bones seemed fragile beneath the heavy linked iron, which would so soon begin to chafe and tear the skin.

The first shackle was on and the priest began to fasten the second. The metal clanked a little and he did not hear the inner door from the church creak open. The first new sound that he heard was a voice which said: "In the name of God, do not make me kill you."

He looked up and saw the gun before he saw the face crouched over it.

JEAN-LOUIS CALVORESI's thin white face was twitching ceaselessly from tiredness, from tension, from the turmoil which had gone on inside him all through that endless day. But the small gun that he held was steady. "Get up," he said. "But stay over there—both of you."

For the first time, the Penitent stirred. The back straightened and slowly the hood came up and the eye-slits were turned directly on Jean-Louis. He felt a violent malevolence, which was echoed in the hoarse voice that came from inside the hood. "Do you think the sins which brought me here are so small that I would hesitate to take another life before I go out and face that crowd?" the muffled voice said.

He took a step forward, awkwardly, the chain dragging. Then a second jerky pace, and Jean-Louis cried out wildly: "I'll kill him. I swear I'll kill him if he comes another step."

The priest put a hand on the Penitent's arm and said: "Stop, I beg you. We are here to purge sin—not to commit new sins."

The Penitent stopped, and slumped again as he stood.

"Listen, Father," said Jean-Louis. "I have not come here to confess, but listen for a moment. He talks of sin. Well, I have sinned. I have killed my brother. A child, a boy, and I killed him, because I was in vendetta and I was a coward and I failed, and this child died for me."

His voice frequently cracked as the words came out rapidly, too rapidly, and he walked about the room, gesticulating with the gun, as he spoke. The Penitent stood with lowered hood, seeming to take no part; and the priest's eyes, compassionate, followed Jean-Louis.

"I came here today to meet the man who killed my brother in vendetta. He is out there, somewhere in that crowd, waiting

for me to find him. All day I have fought with the cowardice that is inside me, so that when I find him I may not be shamed, as I was shamed before."

"And have you won your struggle, my son?"

"I don't know. If I can find the strength to kill him, will that atone for a dead child? A child, Father. And if I die, will I have to die with this guilt and shame still on me?"

He was circling the room, scarcely seeming to look at them now.

"I came into the church—hours ago; it was empty—to think even if I could not pray."

"And so?"

The priest's voice was gentle as he twisted his neck to watch Jean-Louis pass behind them. The movement that answered him was swift and shocking in its violence. Jean-Louis paused behind the Penitent, brought up his arm, and smashed the gun-butt down on the back of the hood. The Penitent gave a low cry, crumpled at the knees, and toppled forward on to his face.

The priest stared at Jean-Louis across the fallen body, its robes awry.

He understood.

"You see, Father," said Jean-Louis simply, "I must take the Penitent's place. You could not stop me now, even if you wanted to. Once I am out there, nothing you say can stop the crowd. Even if you made them understand, they would only scourge me the worse—and that, after all, is what I have chosen: to be punished and purged."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards, I shall seek out my enemy in vendetta, and perhaps then there will be no more shame."

Resounding through the empty church, there came the echoes of a knocking at the outer door. "You have no time to decide, Father," said Jean-Louis. "We must not keep them waiting."

He bent to begin to unfasten the unconscious Penitent's robe, but the priest's cry stopped him. "No! On one thing I insist. You have robbed him of his atonement—but you shall not see his face. I will not break my vow. I will give you his robes, but you will not look at his face."

Jean-Louis turned his back, and a few moments later the robe fell at his feet. As he buttoned himself into the heavy cloth, he said: "I will trust you, Father. There is no other way. But do not forget that I am desperate... We can leave the other here. If he has any sense, he'll creep out of the back door when he recovers. He, too, dare not speak."

He pulled the hood down over his head and fastened the last button. At once he felt strangely isolated, shut in a tiny cell, hot from his own breath and alone with the sweat and the blood of all those unknown men who had worn the robes before him. He took off his shoes and socks and waited while the priest fastened the chains on his ankles. At last he took a deep breath.

"I'm ready," he said.

The night hit them like a blow. There was a sudden silence, and then a huge sigh as if all those thousands of waiting people breathed out together in a shuddering anticipation. And then the murmur: "Le Catenacciu . . . le Catenacciu . . ." the words running together and losing themselves in a blood-baying, a prayer for prey.

Someone pushed Jean-Louis forward, and in that instant thousands of points of light sprang up wherever his eyes rested. On every window sill, a candle was lighted. Others appeared in the crowd, held high. The flickers of light multiplied and spread and moved, and now his eyes grew accustomed to them, and sometimes he could see a face—avid, expectant—in the yellow glow.

He was pushed again and he stumbled down the steps into the clearing at their foot. He turned his head slowly: so many faces; so much hatred, and fear; so many hands; so many voices. And then a crushing weight descended on his right shoulder so that he stumbled and almost fell. It was the cross, the heavy wooden cross that the Penitent had to bear through the town. He seized hold of the rough wood with both hands, and let the other end rest on the cobblestones. Then, summoning all his strength, he began to drag his feet forward.

He did not know where he was going but, almost mystically, at every step the crowd parted to let him through, and he simply went where the paths opened.

The noise of the crowd was taking on a rhythm, a shape. More and more voices throbbed the pulse-beat, and at last he could make out the words of the sobbing chant:—

"*Perdono, mio Dio,*
Mio Dio, perdono!
Perdono, mio Dio,
Perdono, Pieta!"

The words came low from a thousand throats, and he tried to move his bare feet in time to the syllables, like a soldier

seeking strength from the remorseless beat of a drum. The chains dragged behind him, their shackles already tearing the thin flesh. The weight of the cross seemed to be eating through his shoulder. It was lodged on bone, and he tried desperately to move it, but could not find the strength.

Suddenly, a new pain shot through his feet. And another, and another. He almost fell, and over the chant there rose a new note in the crowd. Curses and cries of hate came to him, and then he saw their hands moving, and he knew what the new pain was, and that it would last until the end of his journey.

They were throwing drawing pins in his path, and nails, and broken glass. He tried clumsily to avoid them, but it was impossible. Those of the crowd nearest to him crouched at his feet and spread the drawing pins where he could not miss them.

He saw a hand smash a bottle on the stones and the glass gashed the soles of his feet.

More bottles were smashed, some still full of wine, and the red liquid mixed with his blood.

The crowd were shrieking now, and those at the back urged those at the front to new attacks. Someone jabbed a lighted candle at his hood. Fingers clutched at his robe and scrabbled for the buttons. Now blows fell on his back, from fists and sticks. A woman, her face contorted, jabbed at his eye-slits with an old-fashioned hat-pin. A small boy ran along beside him, pricking at his arm with a kitchen knife.

And all the time the laceration of the feet, the glass and the nails, and the bone-breaking weight of the cross. All the time the animal yells from the open mouths around him, all jeering, all hating, all punishing him for God-knows-what real or imaginary sins in their own lives.

He did not know how far he had gone. Time was the measure of a dragging foot, the sharp stab of a new pain when he had thought there were no more pains left to know. It seemed as if he had climbed steps, dragging and bumping the cross, and had stumbled down them again. He thought he was back in the square. He did not know; he did not care; he saw no farther ahead than the jabbing hands that were always in front of his eyes.

He tried to think of money—of Genovese, of a million francs that once had seemed so important; but now it did not have enough meaning to survive a second's pain. He thought of courage, and guilt, and pain. And pain, and degradation. And guilt, and pain, and guilt. And then the guilt was going,

everything was going but the pain of it, the ecstasy of the pain of it, and then the pain at last broke through the shell that encloses understanding, and he knew nothing and everything, and there was only pain.

THE crowd was swirling and re-forming as the Penitent's long journey neared its end, and those who knew were trying to force their way to the clearing at the foot of the church steps where at last he was to lay down his cross.

Mariane had seized Webb's hand and was trying to drag and hurry him through the press of bodies to this vantage point. Something in the fever of that night had infected her Corsican blood, and she was excited, a little hysterical, as she urged him on not to miss the climactic moment.

Webb let himself be carried forward by the girl and by the movement of the crowd. Suddenly he stopped, pulling back on her outstretched arm, and as she turned to him, her face flushed, he pointed.

"My God! Look!"

"What? I don't understand."

"Over there. Look! That man!"

"You don't mean Jean-Louis?"

She was staring along the line of his pointing finger, but could recognise no face.

"It's Matteo," he said. "Just across there. For God's sake, surely you remember the knife Game?"

At last she saw, perhaps 20 yards away on the other side of the clearing, the stocky, rigid figure, making no movement, staring at nothing, seeing neither them nor the faces around him: waiting.

"I've got to get over there," Webb said urgently. "If I've seen him, Jean-Louis might. I must be there."

"No! Please!"

She sobbed and clung to his arm, the hysteria of the night breaking through.

"I'm sorry. I must."

He shook her free, and began to push towards Matteo.

"Thomas, please, I beg you!"

Her voice came out in a scream, the English Christian name piercing and strange over the noises of the crowd. It reached the ears of a man standing on the church steps. He was a grotesque figure, in his long white overall and black beret. His eyes travelled slowly, methodically, over the faces below

IN Argosy next month

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD IS BACK!

In a long story, complete in this issue, Household is at his best as he follows the wily skulduggery of some Spanish aristocrats bent on outwitting the authorities

PLUS stories by

WINSTON GRAHAM
BRUCE JAY FRIEDMAN
ANTHONY MASTERS
D'ARCY NILAND
GILBERT ROGIN

All in the May issue of Argosy
on sale April 6

him. Then they rested, and he began to descend into the people, elbowing furiously to press through them in time.

Webb got within perhaps ten feet of Matteo when the cry went up that the Penitent approached, and the crowd froze and he was stuck, helpless, like a piece of timber in a log-jam. From somewhere behind he heard the cry of Mariane: "Thomas! Thomas!"

He strained on tiptoe to see what was going on, to try to keep his eyes on Matteo.

The crowd opened somewhere in front and the stumbling figure of the Penitent appeared, bowed low, moving blindly, each foot dragging with infinite slowness before the other.

Now that the end was in sight, the mood of the crowd had changed. There were no more curses and cries of hate. Instead, the voices were compassionate, and urged the Penitent on.

The hate and the fury were purged now, but inside the stifling hood Jean-Louis was not even aware of the change. He did not register that the voices were saying: "Just a little farther. You are nearly there. Just a little farther, and God be with you."

They were merely sounds from another world that he seemed to have lost a lifetime ago.

Through a haze of blood, narrowed by the slits of the hood, he could see the never-ending hands stretching towards him, and did not know that they were trying to support him, not to bruise him; to encourage him on those last few yards.

He did not think he could last much longer. He knew that, by tradition, the Penitent was supposed to fall, ritually, three times on his journey: he had lost count of the number of times he had fallen and somehow found his feet again. If he fell once more, he did not know if he would have the strength to rise. Don't fall... Watch your feet... one after the other... one, two... one, two... watch them... move them... one, two... one, two... hear nothing, see nothing... just move your feet.....one...

The chain was caught. Someone in the crowd closing in, reverently now, behind him had trodden on it. He swayed, faltered, fell.

Strong hands were taking the cross from his back; pitying voices were saying:

"Don't worry, you are nearly there."

He had to go on. Just a few more yards, to seek the

absolution and the blessing. If only he could rise. It was easier without that crushing weight on his back; but if only he could rise, hold on to something.

Without realising it he was crawling, on his hands and knees, groping before him with one outstretched arm. Respecting his struggle, the people stood back.

His hand met something—material, a body, something immovable. He clutched at the cloth; then with the other hand. He raised his hands higher—they seemed to be holding the lapels of a coat. For a moment he let his head fall forward against the strong body; then he exerted all his remaining strength to drag himself up.

Close before the eye-slits of his hood he could see the material of a brown jacket. Then a shirt, blue. If he could drag himself a little higher, he might be able to take his own weight on his feet. Just a little higher. Now a dark-brown V, fuzzed with white hairs at the open neck of the shirt was immediately before his eyes. Just a little higher . . . A stubbled neck . . . A silver chain.

Jean-Louis Calvoresi let out a cry that might have come from an animal caught in a steel trap. He was beyond thought, now. All he could see, millimetres from his eyes, was the silver Calvoresi cross on its thin silver chain. He did not know if it was real, or a fantasy from the deep, mad world of his pain. He did not know and he did not ask. He pushed himself back from the figure and from the silver cross and, swaying on his feet, fumbled a hand inside his robe for the gun which had stayed in his belt all that night. He tugged at it, desperately.

He was oblivious of time, but to those around scarcely a moment had passed since his agonised cry. Matteo heard its note, and wondered, and a sudden wave of instinct rather than thought told him who could be concealed behind the Penitent's stained hood.

He stepped forward, his arms reaching out.

As he moved, the crowd surged forward, startled by the Penitent's cry. Jean-Louis was jogged and jostled. He struggled with the gun under his robe, and suddenly he was being crushed by people and he was falling, falling, and his finger tightened on the trigger, and a gush of wetness and heat and looseness and washing of pain was in his stomach. It was red and black and wet and hot, and an agony that disappeared fast, like a wind rushing past his ears, and then there was nothing.

☆ ★ ☆

The people did not seem to understand. Those nearest heard the sound of the shot, but they did not comprehend. Matteo bent to unfasten the Penitent's robe, and one or two stooped to help him, and when they saw the still figure within, and the blood, they were stunned.

A mutter began: "*Le Catenacciu est mort,*" and as it was passed from mouth to mouth through the crowd the mutter became a rumble, and then a shout. The words changed. They became "The Christ is dead . . . the Christ is dead," and a fierceness, already prepared by the hours that had gone before, began to spread through the bewilderment.

In the commotion, Webb had been pushing towards Matteo. Before he was within speaking distance, he saw the red hood pulled back from the figure on the cobbles and, with a sick turning of the stomach, recognised the dead face of Jean-Louis.

He halted for a moment. Then, as he was about to take another pace forward, something jabbed hard against his spine and a voice said in his ear: "Not that way, Mr. Webb. Out of this crowd—quick. I want to talk to you."

Webb recognised the voice of Max Genovese, and he began to turn, and the jab came again in his back and the voice said: "This is a gun, Mr. Webb, and if you don't do as I say, instantly, I shall fire it. Come!"

"Calvoresi," Webb found himself saying. "Jean-Louis. He's dead."

"All the more reason why you will talk, then. Don't get any ideas about calling for help. It doesn't take long to shoot a man, and I can be lost in this mob in half a second. Come!"

The gun jabbed again. Genovese was standing so close behind him, to conceal the weapon from sight, that Webb could feel his breath on the back of his neck. He began to move in the direction he was pushed. He was dazed. The cries from the crowd made his head spin. The mob was chanting a new cry now: "*Mort à l' assassin du Christ!*" . . . "The Christ is dead! Death to the killer of Christ!"

There was a fury in the chant, and people were turning and twisting and staring at each other, and police were vainly trying to push their way through.

"Tho-mas!"

Over the chant, the voice of Mariane came from somewhere near. Without thinking, Webb pushed to one side for a second, to look for the source of the voice. Genovese was taken by surprise. Instead of firing, he stepped forward quickly to close the gap between him and Webb. His revolver was exposed

only for an instant, but it was enough. It was seen, and somebody pointed, and said: "A gun! He has a gun!"

And the other voices were still chanting: "Death to the killer of Christ!" and the new voices yelled: "A gun, he has a gun," and more voices cried: "There he is. There is the killer of Christ."

The shouts were a cacophony, and hands began to clutch Genovese, and he realised, and tried to put the gun away, but it was too late. He began to push and kick, to yell himself in meaningless words, to try to fight his way through.

Not once did he press the trigger. He never knew why not. He was seized with blind panic as the hands became fists and pounded at him, and the fingers became nails which clawed at him, and the cry got louder: "Death to the killer of Christ," and they were all on him, the pack was on him, and he went down among their boots and their blows.

THE street lights were on in the square now, the candles extinguished, and the litter on the cobbles was bleak and meaningless. Broken glass, stones, bottle tops, some splintered pieces of wood, wisps of paper gently stirred by the night breeze.

The people had been cleared away. Some had been taken to the priest's room at the back of the church, there to be questioned by little Monsieur Cargese. There were not many, for the moment the police started grabbing for witnesses, the crowd began to disperse, and few could be found who would admit to having seen anything.

The priest stood by a wall, his face anguished. Webb and Mariane were among the last to be questioned. Their statements were the most positive, and Cargese's sharp assistant wrote busily while they spoke. When they had finished Webb said bitterly: "So it worked. You staked me out like a tame goat, and it worked. Better than you expected. You got two bodies for the price of one. You should be pleased."

Cargese shrugged. "I am glad you are alive, Mr. Webb."

Mariane said: "Please. It is over. Can't we leave it?"

"Not quite yet," said Cargese. "There is still the question of the money. That old fool, the one who shot the Arab—it seems pretty clear that he saw the OAS men digging when they were in the village. He can find the place. Tomorrow morning he will take us there and we shall see what they hid. I think you might like to join me, Mr. Webb."

"Not really."

"It is what those men died for. It seems a pity to miss it. I shall want you around for a time to sign your statement, anyway. What do you say?"

He looked down at Mariane, and she whispered: "Why not? For Jean-Louis' sake . . ." and he wanted no more decisions, so he said: "All right. Tell me where to meet you."

They found their borrowed car where they had parked it on the outskirts of the town, and headed into the night. Mariane slumped in the seat beside Webb and was asleep in seconds.

His eyes screwed up to watch the lane of his headlights on the twisting road, and it was more and more difficult to stay awake. At last he gave up. They were passing through one of the climbing pine forests, and he pulled the car off the road under the trees, hunched in his seat and prepared to sleep. Mariane stirred and muttered something. It sounded like: "Don't leave me."

Whatever it was, he answered: "I won't leave you, my dear," and put an arm round her shoulders so that her head fell against his chest. She did not wake. Her face looked very innocent.

Webb let himself slip into sleep, knowing that the sunrise would wake them for the last part of the journey.

IN the clearing on the mountain flank north-west of Christiu the little party sweated, although the air of the bright morning was cool. Cargese was there with his inevitable assistant; and Webb and Mariane; and the old idiot, handcuffed to a policeman; and the idiot's brother, hovering apologetically at their backs; and two more policemen, jacketless, digging in the hard and rocky earth.

One of the diggers at last threw down his shovel and said: "It's no use—there's nothing more but solid rock!" He looked round. Two other holes, dug and abandoned, gawped at him.

Cargese was fuming. Three times the old fool had been certain he had recognised the tree beneath which the OAS men had dug. Three times he had been wrong; and now Cargese was wondering if that wracked and raddled memory held anything at all—beyond Verdun.

"Think, old friend," he said with an effort of control. "You saw them digging, no?"

The old fool hopped excitedly. "Yes, yes, digging-in, they were. An emplacement, I bet. Good spot for a sniper."

"But *where*?"

Irritably; "Under the tree, I told you."

"But are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure... Mark you, if I hadn't seen them pushing the boulder over the place, I might never have known where it was, but..."

Cargese smote his forehead. "You never mentioned a boulder before," he said patiently.

The old man was aggrieved. "Well, you never asked me."

Cargese looked round. There was indeed a rock, about three feet high, not six feet from where he stood, at the foot of a chestnut tree. His assistant was sitting on it, staring at Mariane's ankles.

"Is that the boulder?" he asked.

"You see another?" said the old man. "Stupid question!"

Two paces took Cargese to it, and his assistant looked up. "Pardon me for disturbing you," Cargese said icily, "but I have reason to believe that you are sitting on a fortune."

There must have been some fission in the rock, because they dug fully five feet before one of the toiling policemen tossed up part of the handle of a briefcase. Then another.

Mariane huddled against Webb and shivered slightly. "I was just thinking of all that led to this moment," she said.

More scraps of leather came out. Then a handful of sodden, shredded and discoloured paper.

Cargese leapt into the hole, his head vanished for a moment and then reappeared.

"Rotted!" he said. "All rotted! You'd be lucky to find enough whole notes here to buy a box of matches. Why in heaven's name didn't the fools use a proper box? Perhaps they thought they'd be back sooner..."

"Perhaps they were just fools," said Webb.

Cargese scooped up a nest of torn and half-pulped bank-notes in both his hands; then parted his hands and watched the paper fall. Some of the smaller shreds were caught briefly by the breeze, and spun and sailed for a moment before falling to the ground.

"This, Mr. Webb, is what they all died for," said Cargese.

IT was dusk, but not yet dark. At this time of the year, and in mid-week, the evening boat to Marseilles was not crowded, and they easily found a place by the rail to watch the hawsers cast off, and the still sea at the stern suddenly churned and

threshed. Gulls swooped low, screaming, and a deafening whistle came from the siren, its jet of white steam rising up and threading into the black smoke which gushed from the funnel.

They leaned on the rail and stared as the waterfront of Ajaccio became smaller, toylike. From here they could see the division clearly: on one side, the bright lights, and the moored yachts; on the other side, the coming blackness, where the lights ended, where the cobbles were rough, and the darkness would be something ancient and unknown.

"You know," said Mariane, "Napoleon is supposed to have said he could smell the *maquis* from way out to sea whenever he came back to Corsica. Do you think that's true?"

He put his arm round her shoulder, and she huddled closer to him against the breeze. "I don't know. I don't know very much at all."

"What do you think you should know?"

"Oh . . . lots of things. What I'm going to do about getting a job . . . whether I should try to live in France, or go back to England . . . what we're going to live on . . . lots of things."

"But it is 'we,' Thomas? Where 'we' go? What 'we' live on? You are sure that is what you want?"

He bent and gently kissed her hair. "That," he said, "is all I do know, and all I need to know."

They turned their backs to the shore, from which the wind blew more fiercely now. They did not see the island vanish into the dusk behind them, but after a while a ghost of a fragrance came to them. Perhaps it was imagination, perhaps it was memory; but it stayed with them a long time.

POSTSCRIPT

This story is fiction and its characters are imaginary. But the island is real, and so is the spirit of the islanders, which the characters try to convey.

There is a real Penitent's procession of Le Catenacciu, and it takes place each Easter in the lovely town of Sartène. Much of the history of Le Catenacciu given in this story is based on fact; but Vannina is not Sartène, and its people are not Sartène's; and the events of the Night of the Penitent described here happened only to Thomas Webb and Mariane, to Matteo and Jean-Louis, and to Max Genovese; and to none other.

© Lawrence Hammond 1966

This serial was condensed from the novel "A Life to Lose," which was published on March 7 by W. H. Allen (18s.)

RONALD DUNCAN

REVIEWS

New Books

WHEN Lord Salisbury spoke in the debate on the Rhodesia issue in the House of Lords, he first "declared his interest" by admitting that he had a financial stake in two farms in that country. This kind of probity should be emulated. Literary critics should, I think, declare their own credentials which give them some right to criticise others. So let me state at the beginning that though I am a playwright I have, in fact, written two novels. It is fair to admit that neither was successful. That is to say they did not sell well. I have not tried to write a third novel because it has become a form which has lost definition. What is a novel? Judging by the examples in front of me, today it could be defined as the description of a series of copulations between hard covers.

Of course Messrs. Constable and William Heinemann believe they are contributing to literature. And today it is tacitly understood that prose must approach realism and that realism should be exotic. Or at any rate, it is understood that these are the qualities that sell. Again let me declare an interest; I wrote a play, *The Catalyst*, which was banned by the Lord Chamberlain for five years. I can therefore hardly be accused of being a literary prude myself.

But there is, I believe, a distinction between fornication and sexual intercourse. The former is one of relief; the latter implies an emotional, even spiritual (if one dare use such an obscene word today) involvement between two characters. By this distinction these novels depict fornication and they did not do that particularly well.

The Virgin Soldiers, the publishers inform us on the garish dust-cover: "*is a novel that simply never misses: tough, erotic,*

and gloriously funny." It is odd how "toughness" is now a prerequisite of literature and has replaced "sensitivity" or "sensibility." Clearly there would be no room for Miss Austen today.

We are also informed that Leslie Thomas, the author of *The Virgin Soldiers, "spent some years of his early life in Dr. Barnardo's Homes, immortalised in his first book, 'This Time Next Week.'"* It is, of course, possible that this book sold well, but it is strange to see a book which was published only in 1964 being described as immortal. Or perhaps Messrs. Constable have also been seduced by the author's careless use of words? The rest of the blurb informs us that Thomas spent his two years of National Service in Singapore, left the Army with the rank of Private, and has since been a travelling journalist, covering the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and a couple of Royal tours, besides globe-trotting elsewhere.

By giving us this information the publishers are making two implicit assumptions which today go unquestioned. They are that a good novel can only emerge from experience (two years of National Service in Malaya) rather than from the imagination; and also there is the claim that since Thomas has been trained as a reporter his fiction will be good because it is realistic. And this realism (or do they not mean naturalism?) is put forward as the *sine qua non* of contemporary prose.

These two assumptions must be questioned. Once upon a time we talked about "the ink still being wet" on a page of prose, then later it was "straight from the typewriter"; but now the appropriate question is: has Mr. Thomas' prose the authentic ring of the tape machine?

Unfortunately I think it has. There is no doubt that *The Virgin Soldiers* is life-like; but since when has that been the whole of literature? It is as silly, if you think about it, to assume that a good novel is merely a slice of life as it is to believe that a good meal is a slice of Spam. Indeed, an argument could be put forward, though no-one would listen to it today, that art does not have to be life-like, but greater than life, i.e., an imaginative germ, fertilised by experience, grown within the limits of a form and refined by what was once

known as the disciplines of the creative process. Which is a long way from the Dictaphone. Of course it has long been apparent that the so-called sexual liberation released into the novel by Lawrence (and a little earlier by Boccaccio) would lead to it becoming a convention and then finally a cliché. This has happened. As I say, the novels before me each describe their quota of dreary copulations in which one observes that the heroes persist in the best British Public School (or Dr. Barnardo) tradition of regarding women as urinals. None of these characters asks his partner whether she has been satisfied from the combat on the couch . . . "*He unzipped her, an experience in sight, sound and sensation as erotic as anything he had ever dreamed even on one of his bad nights.*

"*She was wearing a white bra, stretched across her pale, brown shoulder blades like a suspension bridge. Her green panties had a hole in the seat, which was unromantic and frankly off-putting, but it was obviously the work of moth or mouse rather than man.*

"'*Undo,*' *she ordered casually over her shoulder. He managed to unhook the bra and feel, with considerable joy in achievement, the weight at the front pull forward. She remained quite still now, expecting him to do something.*"

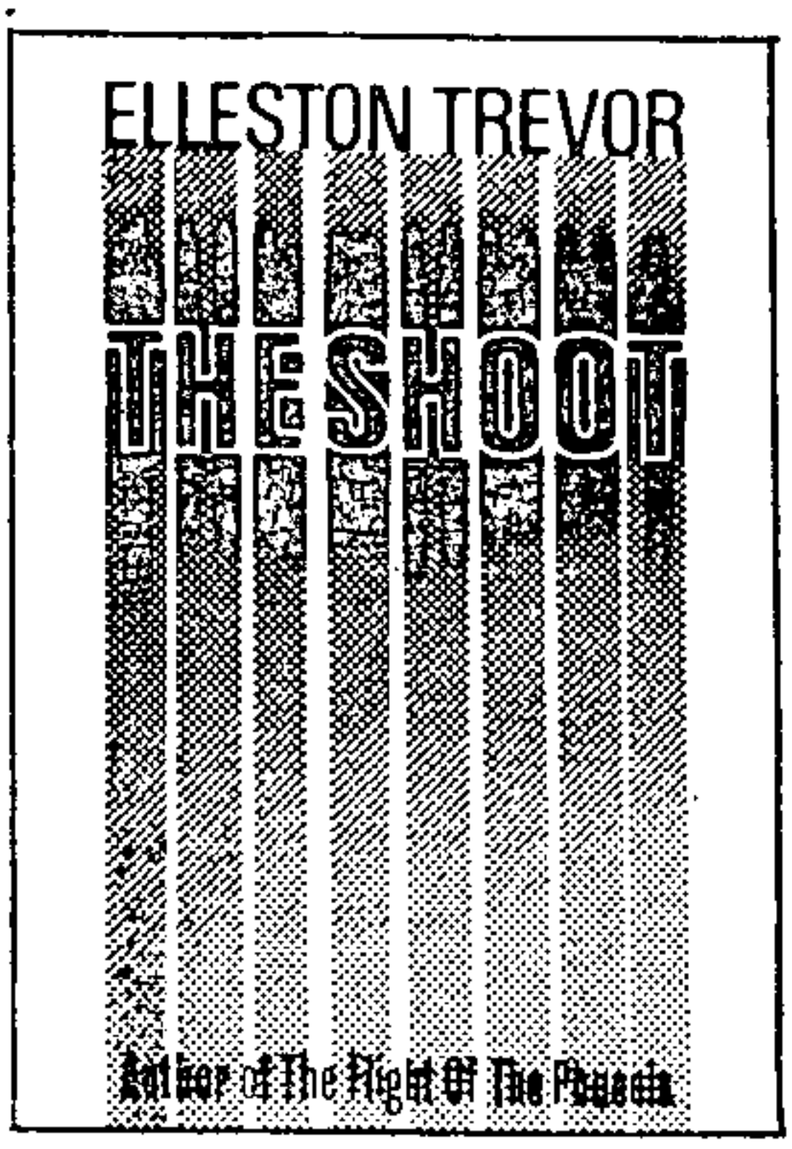
Ronald Duncan, poet and playright, was once described by Ezra Pound as "the lone wolf of English letters." This rare independence shines through in his controversial plays including "The Catalyst," "This Way to the Tomb," and "Abelard and Heloise." But perhaps Duncan, the champion of all forms of art, is best portrayed in his autobiography, "All Men Are Islands."

This, of course, is all very "tough." But after a couple of realistic descriptions of a bout with a Chinese prostitute, where can you go from there? Mr. Thomas is shrewd enough to perceive that fornication is as much a platitude to the modern novel as taking tea with the neighbouring Squire was to "the *genre*" of Mansfield Park. So of course new ground had to be broken. The aspiring novelist today does not have the problem: how to write, but simply: how to shock. I suppose Mr. Leslie Thomas achieves this aim if his readers are virgin schoolgirls.

When Mr. Thomas dares to lay off the clichés of contraceptives, he can write sensitively and well. (Constable, 21s.)

ELLESTON TREVOR's latest novel, *The Shoot*, deals with a missile shoot on a remote island in the Pacific. It is "*a brilliant picture of the conflict of men with nature, technical hazards and their own dangerous limitations in a field where there is no margin of error,*" and is a typical piece of quasi science-fiction prose with a Freudian overlay.

..."*But where was his sex being expressed? In White Lance. And he was scared of failure—of another failure, after the BJ-9 flop. Scared of impotence. Nothing must spoil the shoot—the orgasm. Especially in front of Pyne, whose erection, though in one way less powerful, was more powerful in that it was an aggressive weapon and designed to make the war that Chapel hated.*"



This is really having the best of both worlds. Exploiting rockets as scientific toys and as phallic symbols too. But in spite of highly technical descriptions of the rocket launch and the micro-electronics involved, Mr. Trevor cannot dare ignore the current convention.

..."'*Listen,' he said, drawing her face against him as if she were a child, 'a whore is a woman who doesn't do it for love.'*

"'*Love? You mean who doesn't love it, love doing it.' Her hands dug into his arm. 'Then I'm no whore ...it's all I live for, now.' After that day she never spoke about her marriage, nor of anything that did not spring to her tongue from the heat of their love-making.*"

But the Commanding Officer of the rocket has qualms.

..."*Should a man whose hands held life or death for five million people be found rutting like an animal each time the sun rose? Dear God, he must be out of his mind ...*"

However, the full maturity and sophistication of Trevor's characters can be assessed by another passage.

..."*Mind over matter, Robert Nash, you are an officer and a gentleman, and crazy about a girl who is the lawful wedded wife of a most respected boffin who happens also, in a way, to be your host. So bloody well forget it, the whole thing.*"

Of course, to be fair to Mr. Trevor, he really was not trying to write a novel anyhow, but the draft scenario for a film. I think he will be successful. (Heinemann, 18s.)

GRAHAM GREENE's latest novel, *The Comedians*, is also certain to be made into a film. Though I am sure that was not his object in writing it. Unlike the other two books, it does not rely on its background, but the characters within it.

Set in Haiti under the tyranny of Duvalier or Papa Doc, with his Tontons Macoute thugs wearing their dark glasses and driving around in Cadillacs obtained from American Aid, the book has the requisite amount of colour, violence and contemporary political chaos about it. But this and Baron Samedi and voodoo remain, as they should, essentially a background to the characters. These are so well drawn that they walk out of the page and demand to be dramatised.

The book is written in the first person, and in a foreword Greene unnecessarily disclaims any identification with the hero. It is unlikely that the mental courage that Graham Greene displays would be coupled with physical bravery too. Though I suppose in this day and age, when experience is at a premium and imagination is discounted, the author felt it necessary to make this point.

His hero is essentially unheroic. He is a sixty-year-old man with a Catholic background, stateless and illegitimate, who manages somehow still to regard "*his future seriously—even the future of my empty hotel and the love affair which was almost as empty.*" But the Catholic background is remote. In his teens he lost his vocation in the casino at Monte Carlo.

"*When I was a boy I had faith in the Christian God . . . Now that I approached the end of life it was only my sense of humour that enabled me sometimes to believe in Him. Life was a comedy, not the tragedy for which I had been prepared.*" Appropriately this disillusioned character (and if illusions are false and something we do not want, disillusion is something we do) ends up as an undertaker's assistant. The title is apt: *The Comedians* can make you laugh till the tears come.

As in the other two novels, the contemporary sexual convention is maintained. By Chapter Two the hero is making love to a girl in a car, and though the author stops to comment on the discomfort of the gear lever, he omits to describe the girl's

appearance, or even the colour of her eyes. This is an omission. If novelists today are going to take us to bed every twenty pages with a girl, they might at least introduce us. Otherwise we are made to feel like Peeping Toms. But there is nothing salacious in Greene's intention. He describes these scenes not with pornographic intent, but because he wishes to emphasise that his characters are without love. And the mature comment that Martha makes at the end of this bleak affair is by itself sufficient justification for it:

...*"Perhaps the sexual life is the great test. If we can survive it with charity to those we love and with affection to those we have betrayed, we needn't worry so much about the good and the bad in us. But jealousy, distrust, cruelty, revenge, recrimination... then we fail. The wrong is in that failure even if we are the victims and not the executioners. Virtue is no excuse."*

And then later there is the pregnant comment which is worth several contemporary novels:

...*"For the first time we had trusted each other with something more than a caress."*

It is a story about the committed and the uncommitted. Each side is drawn in the round, with that precise detail that makes them people as opposed to types. I found myself casting these characters as I read the book. Mr. Smith, who stood as a Presidential candidate of the United States, as a Vegetarian, and who, with his gentle wife, believes that acidity is the cause of violence and has a mission to establish a vegetarian centre in Haiti, might have been played by Claude Rains. His idealism is irrepressible. Speaking of his wife, he says: *"I have been married for thirty-five years and I have never ceased to admire that woman."*

It is no small achievement that Graham Greene makes these two characters so believable that one feels protective towards them. And a deft touch or two makes Doctor Magiot, the Negro Communist, a person.

...*"He was very big and very black, but he possessed great gentleness—he would never ill-treat, I felt sure, even an inanimate object, such as a recalcitrant chair. Nothing can be more inconsiderate to a man of Doctor Magiot's profession than a telephone. But when it rang once during our conversation he lifted the receiver as gently as he would have raised a patient's wrist."*

But it is in the characterisation of Major Jones that the author is most successful. Here is Falstaff brought up to

date—a cowardly poseur who boasts that he was a Commando in Burma, but in the end confesses that he has flat feet and was, in fact, no more than an underling in ENSA who once nearly met Noel Coward.

The details are devastatingly accurate. Jones carries a leather bottle-container made by Asprey's wherever he goes. He says his battalion presented it to him. In fact he stole it.

The humour is not only in the situation or in the characters' foibles, but where it should be also, that is, in the words which alone produce wit:

..."*The Secretary of Education was announcing a six-year plan to eliminate illiteracy in the North—why the North in particular? Perhaps he was depending on a satisfactory hurricane. Hurricane Hazel had eliminated a great deal of illiteracy in the interior.*"

..."*For a moment fidelity became a temptation.*"

..."*His mouth was full of gold teeth, probably not his own.*"

It is by these details that *The Comedians* succeeds. Like every good comedy, it has a serious didactic purpose.

"*We are the faithless; we admire the dedicated, the Doctor Magiots and the Mr. Smiths for their courage and their integrity, for their fidelity to a cause, but through timidity, or through lack of sufficient zest, we find ourselves the only ones truly committed—committed to the whole world of evil and of good, to the wise and to the foolish, to the indifferent and to the mistaken. We have chosen nothing except to go on living, 'rolled round on Earth's diurnal course, with rocks and stones and trees.'*"

And this message is also explicit in:

"*The Church condemns violence, but it condemns indifference more harshly. Violence can be the expression of love, indifference never. One is an imperfection of charity, the other the perfection of egoism. In the days of fear, doubt and confusion, the simplicity and loyalty of one apostle advocated a political solution. He was wrong, but I would rather be wrong with St. Thomas than right with the cold and the craven.*"

What is a novel? Perhaps it is: a growth of consciousness in prose? And can be judged good or bad by the effectiveness with which it articulates that consciousness? By that criterion, Graham Greene is one of our rare novelists. (Bodley Head, 25s.)

© Ronald Duncan 1966

argosy bookshelf

The Little Genius, by Mervyn Horder, is a spirited memoir of the author's father. The title was inspired by a piece in *The Times* after the death of the first Lord Horder in 1955 and which described him as "this sparkling, lovable little genius."

"Tommy" Horder (as his friends called him), a royal physician for many years, was an individualist of strong character, unorthodox views and a deep love for his fellow men.

His son paints a delightful picture of the man and his family, but he also includes a chapter made up of Lord Horder's own favourite stories drawn from his vast medical experience. (Gerald Duckworth, 25s.)

In the docks at Piræus, Athens, an unknown man steals secretly aboard the British merchant ship, *S.S. Gloriana.*

In London, a Secret Service department is urgently seeking a refugee from the East. This man has vital information and his trail has been lost along the Balkan frontier. This is the scene set in *The Stowaway*, by Ronald Johnston, for an extraordinary story of the fate of a stowaway in a sea-going novel of adventure. (Collins, 18s.)

Since the publication of "Rabbit, Run," John Updike has been firmly established as one of the brighter American novelists.

Now, with *Assorted Prose*, Updike has become a parodist, an autobiographical essayist and a literary critic.

He links his parodies to the literary criticism by an essay on the art of parody. And under a section entitled "Reviews" he writes brilliantly of Alan Sillitoe, Conrad Aiken, James Thurber, Oscar Wilde and Muriel Spark, to name but a few. (André Deutsch, 25s.)

An Odour of Sanctity, by Frank Yerby, is his most ambitious novel to date. Against the harsh setting of the Iberian regions of the tenth century, Mr. Yerby tells the epic story of a young Visigoth nobleman named Alaric.

Wild and brutal battles and market-place riots make this reading on a wide-screen scale. (Heinemann, 30s.)

Electra, by Gladys Schmitt, is a new approach to one of the world's great stories—that of Agamemnon and Cassandra, of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and of Electra and Orestes. The authoress takes the haunted and defiant children of the royal family and gives them a new and poignant humanity and a penetrating analysis of character. (W. H. Allen, 25s.)

With *Our London Office*, the long-awaited addition to the Crowther Novels by Thomas Armstrong, the focus of the great family story shifts from the West Riding of Yorkshire to London.

The time is now 1957, and Charles, the youngest of the three Crowther sons, goes to London to start up his own business. Against a backdrop of working days and playing nights, Charles manipulates in true Crowther fashion, using all the discordant elements in the family to his own advantage.

(Collins, 25s.)

Doreen Wallace's latest novel, *The Millpond*, is also a chronicle—but of just one year's happenings in the East Anglian village of Longham.

The story is focused on the rectory, the humble and the well-to-do—all playing out their lives in a rich variety of incidents.

Doreen Wallace's novels have always won high praise from distinguished critics; this one, we think, is the best.

(Collins, 18s.)

PAPERBACKS

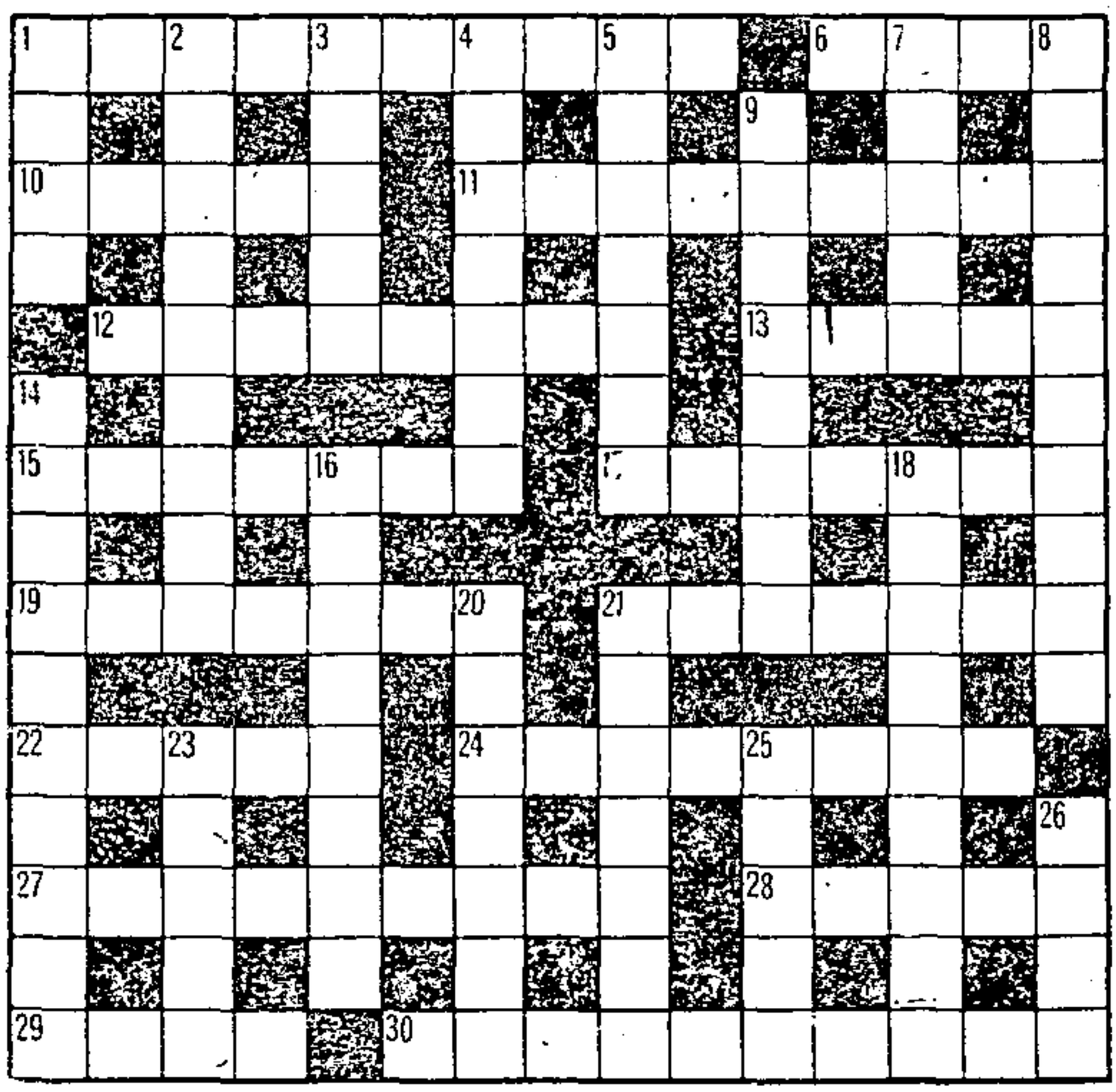
Seven "Nottingham" stories of working-class life are in Allan Sillitoe's collection called *The Ragman's Daughter*. The title story is about two amazing characters, Tony and Doris, who get their kicks from stealing and sex. There is also one about a firebug—but perhaps the best is entitled "The Magic Box," which tells how a husband and wife have their own methods for running away from their personal tragedy. (Pan, 3s. 6d.)

The Student Guide To Britain, by Helen Pickthorn, M.A., gives endless facts about the educational and social facilities in Britain. It's an enormous help to students in finding out exactly what they need to prevent later disappointment.

(Pan, 5s.)

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Recorded and made an impression? (10).

6 Often powdered and perfumed! (4).

10 Bed for a hen? (5).

11 Bug troublesome for reaper (9).

12 Goose is stuck on the old tub! (8).

13 Sculptor put in metal bar first (5).

15 Perhaps Ken will hold the pen (3–4).

17 O how heavenly! (7).

19 Monk's place? You're welcome (7).

21 After the initial thrust? (7).

22 Greek character is showing community spirit (5).

24 Flag of past splendour? (3, 5).

27 Capitalist in USSR? (9).

28 Japanese in Tokyo (5).

29 " Over the sea to —— "(Stevenson) (4).

30 Wanting opera, sir? I'm your man! (10).

DOWN

1 " —— down the golden sand " (Heber) (4).

2 His plan didn't reach the report stage! (3, 6).

3 Seductive singer trying new rinse? (5).

4 I cheat about fifty—moral here? (7).

5 Peer is partially deaf? (7).

7 He did piece-work (5).

8 Stories from the Bible (10).

9 Dirigible, we hear, to be the successor (8).

14 Day of reckoning! (10).

16 Sending out East on service (8).

18 Large basin in stock? (9).

20 Me? I'm the greatest, I am (7).

21 Colourful marsh-plant over on Exmoor (3, 4).

23 He's a dry dog! (5).

25 North America's are biggest—and fresh. (5).

26 Equestrian or aquatic, I'm game! (4).

Printed in England by The Chapel River Press Ltd., Andover, and published on the tenth of each month by Fleetway Publications Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, £2 12s. for 12 months, £1 6s. for 6 months. Overseas, £2 11s. for 12 months, £1 5s. 6d. for 6 months. Sole Agents: Australia and New Zealand, Gordon & Gotch Ltd.; South Africa, Central News Agency Ltd.; Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi, Kingstons Ltd. Argosy is sold subject to the following conditions, namely, that it shall not, without the written consent of the publishers first given, be lent, resold, or hired out, or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade, except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade; or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

MAKE THIS THE YEAR YOU LEARN TO WRITE

The broadcast by the BBC entitled "Can I Learn to be a Writer?" was based on interviews with the senior coach of the London School of Journalism and some of our successful students who spoke of the help they had received in attaining their success.

Their testimony was reinforced by the editress of a great national periodical who spoke of the need for competent instruction in the writing of features intended for publication.

A warning was given about the doubtful value of the claims made by certain schools. If you seek our advice, you will not be lured by lavish promises or bombarded with letters urging enrolment upon you. If you decide to become a member, you will work under a personal coach and your work will be fully criticised and returned promptly . . . no waiting for weeks or even months.

LSJ Courses cover Articles, Stories, Staff Journalism, Radio Plays, T.V. Plays, Literature, History and Poetry.

The informative book gives full details and includes many articles of great value to aspiring writers. It is free on application to :

LONDON SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM (A)

19 Hertford St., Park Lane, London, W.1. GRO 8250

Member of the Association of British Correspondence Colleges

One of the great cigarettes

We could show someone enjoying a Gold Leaf. But we wanted to give you a good look at the great cigarette itself (packed full with rich close-knit Virginia tobacco). For 4/7 you can buy 20 and enjoy them yourself.